DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 484 UD 027 153

AUTHOR	Stoneman, Dorothy; Bell, John
TITLE	Leadership Development: A Handbook from the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools.
INSTITUTION	East Harlem Block Nursery, Inc., New York, NY.
SPONS AGENCY	DeWitt Wallace / Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, N.Y.; Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.; Mott (C.S.) Foundation, Flint, Mich.
PUB DATE	88
NOTE	173p.; For related document, see UD 027 152. A product of the Youth Action Program.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; Community Action; *Community Involvement; Cultural Awareness; *Leadership; *Leadership Training; Program Guides; Self Actualization; Self Esteem; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Social Support Groups; *Urban Programs; Urban Youth; Young Adults; *Youth Leaders
IDENTIFIERS	*Community Service; *Nurturance; Oppression; Political Action

ABSTRACT

This manual is written for adults who work with teenagers and young adults. It is based on the experience of building the Youth Action Program (YAP) of the East Harlem (New York City) Block Schools. The manual begins with background information on the accomplishments and plans of YAP on its 10th anniversary, followed by a section on YAP's basic ideas about leadership development. The remainder of the manual is organized around seven elements that YAP views as essential in developing leaders. "Element One: Counteracting the Effects of Oppression" discusses negative aspects of "adultism" and ways to foster racial and cultural identity. "Element Two: Nurturance" deals with mutual appreciation, self-estimation, and mutual support. "Element Three: Building Leadership Concepts and Skills" describes steps in leadership development. "Element Four: Experiencing Success" reviews elements in individual and community transformation. "Element Five: Educating Young People About World Issues" presents a school curriculum designed to engender youth leadership. "Element Six: Overcoming Academic Deficiencies and Resolving Personal Hang-Ups" argues the importance of developing competitive academic skills and correcting negative and compulsive behaviors. "Element Seven: Organizing to Have Impact on the World" outlines youth-run community improvement projects and steps in organizing a political action campaign. (AF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

Leadership development is our emphasis because

1) The society needs more ethical and effective leaders.

2) Every youth program and school would itself be improved if governed with real input from young people.

3) Leadership can engage young people intensely and deeply, liberating their best energies.

4) Real decision-making responsibility can heal the two deepest wounds of our young people:

    - low self-esteem due to consistent invalidation of their intelligence;

    - feelings of powerlessness, and its companion anger, due to being raised in a thoroughly adult-dominated world, which has not listened to the ideas of the young people.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

A Handbook from the

YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM

of

THE EAST HARLEM BLOCK SCHOOLS

Written by DOROTHY STONEMAN

Assisted by JOHN BELL

Cartoon Illustrations by ANN MESSECAR

Made possible with the assistance of

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

The Ford Foundation

1988

Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10029
(212) 860-8170

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook has been written at the urging of Jon Blyth of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; Gordon Berlin, formerly of the Ford foundation; and Barbara Taylor, formerly of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. I am very grateful to them for their continuing insistence that such a handbook would be extremely useful to other youth programs.

In addition to their personal support, the financial support from Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, and the Ford Foundation have made this manual possible. Of course, it should be understood that these foundations and individuals bear no responsibility for the contents of the manual, and that they do not necessarily agree with the ideas presented herein.

John Bell, a founding staff member at the Youth Action Program (YAP), has contributed several important sections of the manual: "Adultism" and "Systems of Mutual Support". He also made suggestions benefitting the entire text.

Ann Lawler Messecar, the cartoonist, is a former staff member at the East Harlem Block Schools. She contributed her playful and creative art work, which livens up the manual considerably and oftentimes makes its points better than does the text! Additional graphics were contributed by John Bell and David Greene, a teacher at the Youth Action Program.

Jane Arnold worked as advisor, copy-editor, word processor, and general assistant on the project, always with dispatch and good humor.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE 1

THE YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM 3

- The First Decade 5
- The Second Decade: YAP Plans the Future 9

BASIC IDEAS ABOUT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT 13

- Why Leadership Development 15
- The Role of Adults in Developing Youth Leaders 18
- Developing A Concept of Good Leadership 20
- "Leadership" Not "Empowerment" 25
- Seven Essential Elements of Leadership Development 27

ELEMENT ONE: COUNTERACTING THE EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION 29

- Definition of Oppression 31
- Liberation from Past and Present Oppression 33
- Adultism 35
- Recognizing Internalized Oppression 42
- Eliminating Internalized Oppression 45
- Racial and Cultural Identity: A Workshop Format 47

ELEMENT TWO: NURTURANCE 53

- The Importance of Nurturance 55
- Communicating Love to Young People 58
- Personal Friendships with Young People 60
- Mutual Appreciation 62
- Self-Estimation 66
- Systems of Mutual Support 67

ELEMENT THREE: BUILDING LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS AND SKILLS 73

- Identifying Potential Leaders 75
- A Process for Defining Leadership 79
- Decision-Making Processes and Powers 82
- Chairing Meetings 91
- Building Reading and Writing Into the Work 98
- Speaking Truth to Power 101
- The Weekend Retreat 106

ELEMENT FOUR: EXPERIENCING SUCCESS 117

ELEMENT FIVE: EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT WORLD ISSUES 125

- Leadership School Curriculum 127

ELEMENT SIX: OVERCOMING ACADEMIC DEFICIENCIES AND RESOLVING PERSONAL HANG-UPS 135

- Correcting Academic Deficiencies 136
- Helping Leaders Grow Out of Personal Hang-ups 139
- Underlying Doubts 142

ELEMENT SEVEN: ORGANIZING TO HAVE IMPACT ON THE WORLD 145

A) Community Improvement Projects

- Role of the Adult Organizer 147
- Overview of the Implementation Process for Community Improvement Projects 154

B) Political Action

- Some Basic Principles for Organizing Political Action 160
- A Training Session for Organizing an Action Campaign 163
- Developing a Position Paper 165
- Organizing a Rally 167
- A Successful Campaign for Youth Employment 169

POSTSCRIPT 179

PREFACE

This handbook is written for adults who work with teenagers and young adults. It is based on ten years experience building the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools.

The East Harlem Block Schools has for twenty-two years sponsored an array of educational programs serving East Harlem, including day care centers, after school centers, an elementary school, a senior citizens center, and the Youth Action Program. All of its programs are governed by local residents who are either parents of children in the schools or participants in the youth and senior citizens' programs. Thus the concept of leadership development through governance, community improvement, and political action has been applied for over twenty years at the Block Schools, by all ages of community people.

Since 1978, the Youth Action Program has been helping young people implement community improvement projects of their own design, in the context of a comprehensive youth development program.

Our community improvement projects include housing rehabilitation for the homeless; residences for homeless young adults and their children; construction of a park; several large community murals; student governments in local junior high schools; crime prevention patrols; a profit-sharing construction company for the graduates of our construction training program; reclamation of two buildings to create community centers; a coalition which created youth employment programs in New York City; and myriad educational and cultural programs focused on youth development. All of these projects are designed and governed by young people. They are implemented with the help of skilled adults.

Our emphasis is on freeing young people from the effects of past mistreatment so they can take charge of their own lives and become effective and ethical young leaders, committed to the well-being of their community and the world.

The contents of this manual include a great deal of practical advice and information, interlaced with some basic concepts and theory. Many chapters can stand alone as short training documents. Readers have our permission to copy sections and use them as they wish, simply giving credit to the author and the Youth Action Program.

The manual begins with background information on the accomplishments and plans of the Youth Action Program, as presented at YAP's Tenth Anniversary celebration. This is followed by a section on YAP's basic ideas about leadership development.

The remainder of the manual is organized around the seven essential elements of leadership development as we have understood them at the Youth Action Program. A full section of the handbook is devoted to each of the seven essential ellements.

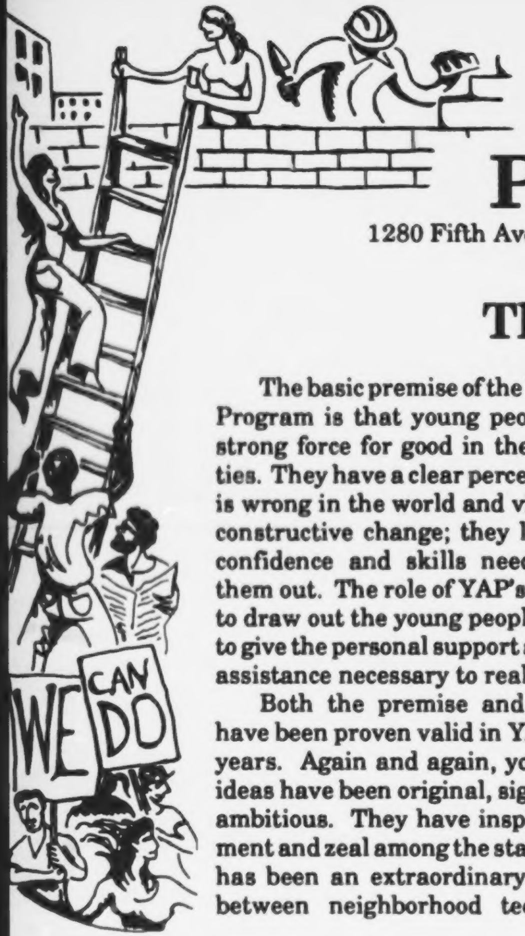
We have arbitrarily varied the use of male and female pronouns from one chapter to the next.

We hope the manual will be fascinating and inspirational. We will be satisfied if it is useful!

THE YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM

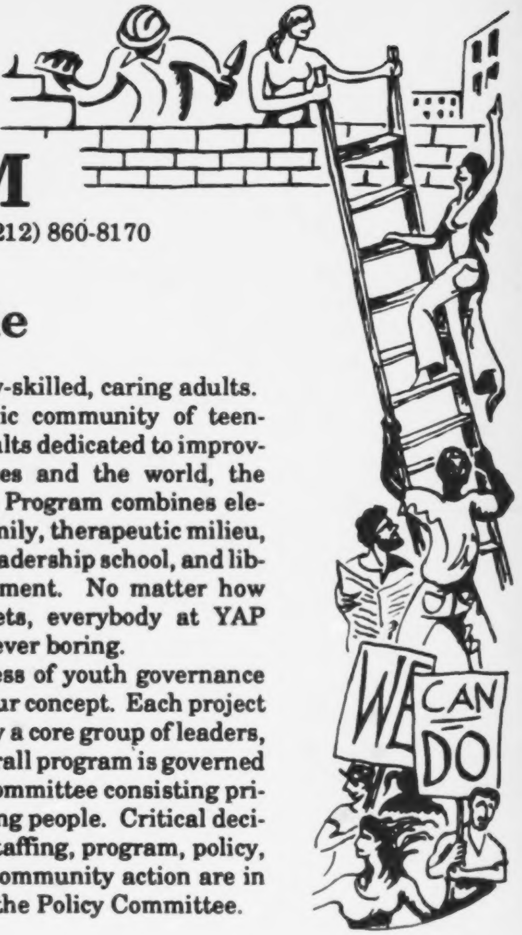
- The First Decade
- The Second Decade:
  YAP Plans the Future

10



YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM

1280 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10029 ♦ (212) 860-8170



The First Decade

The basic premise of the Youth Action Program is that young people can be a strong force for good in their communities. They have a clear perception of what is wrong in the world and vivid ideas for constructive change; they lack only the confidence and skills needed to carry them out. The role of YAP's adult staff is to draw out the young people's ideas and to give the personal support and technical assistance necessary to realize them.

Both the premise and the process have been proven valid in YAP's first ten years. Again and again, young people's ideas have been original, significant, and ambitious. They have inspired commitment and zeal among the staff. The result has been an extraordinary partnership between neighborhood teenagers and professionally-skilled, caring adults.

A dynamic community of teenagers and adults dedicated to improving themselves and the world, the Youth Action Program combines elements of a family, therapeutic milieu, soap opera, leadership school, and liberation movement. No matter how difficult it gets, everybody at YAP agrees it is never boring.

The process of youth governance is central to our concept. Each project is governed by a core group of leaders, while the overall program is governed by a Policy Committee consisting primarily of young people. Critical decisions about staffing, program, policy, budget, and community action are in the hands of the Policy Committee.

"Working in YAP ... we learned from the meetings, the discussions, the decisions we had to make. We learned group dynamics, how to deal with people and problems. We were empowered, because the program was based on our ideas. We got a sense of pride, of importance, something teenagers in East Harlem don't get anywhere else."

Freddy Acosta, a YAP founder, age 24

"YAP gave me a reason to live, something I didn't have before."

Maria Motta, YAP staff member, at age 20
speaking to the City Council President

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Since 1978, we have done the following:

- created two large community centers by renovating an empty church basement and a vacant film studio;
- completed the gut rehabilitation of three abandoned city-owned buildings, creating permanent housing for homeless young people and their children;
- provided full-time intensive training and academic classes for 150 young people in our construction training program, and part-time training for an additional 300;
- established three transitional residences for homeless young people and two residences for homeless young mothers and their children;

- developed a community land trust and built a neighborhood park on a one-third-acre empty lot
- organized a senior citizens' center;
- operated two crime prevention youth patrols;
- created a Youth Agenda for the Eighties from the input of 600 young people and systematically moved to implement the priority recommendations;
- organized four student governments in local junior high schools and an Association of Student Governments to act on their school improvement recommendations;
- generated an Action Plan from the ideas of 400 teenagers regarding how to prevent unwanted teenage pregnancy, and implemented their priority recommendation by developing a pilot program building dialogue between parents and teenagers regarding love, sex, and relationships;
- managed the six-year follow-through of Eugene Lang's original "I Have A Dream" class, which paved the way for over 100 classes to be adopted by sponsors and institutions nationwide; and
- organized and led the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars, 115 agencies and 100 young people, who together persuaded the City government to invest 59 million dollars over a five-year period in employment and remediation programs for 6,000 young people a year.

"In the two years I've been at YAP, there's nothing we've ever said we were going to do that we haven't actually done. It's amazing. It gives me faith. It gives me the courage to stick with the things I care about."

Puma Lee Santiago
Policy Committee member, at age 17

In addition to visible and tangible successes at community improvement and advocacy, we have also influenced, inspired, encouraged, and sometimes transformed the lives, of thousands of young people from East Harlem and other neighborhoods around New York, through our on-going activities: forums, retreats, cultural and recreational activities, speak-outs, conferences, policy-making committees, leadership training, academic classes, weekend retreats, cultural exchanges, public hearings, counseling, friendships, fundraising events, and support groups. We have involved over 3,000 young people for extended periods of time in our programs.

"I would have to say that for the first time since the 8th grade, I come each day and do the hardest I can in class. I used to miss so many days that the teacher didn't even know me or my name. It's also important that I have held a job. I notice a change to a different Anthony."

Anthony Delgado
construction graduate, age 20

ROOTS AND HISTORY

The roots of YAP lie deep in the East Harlem Block Schools. The volunteers who founded YAP in 1978 had been teachers, administrators, and students in the Block Schools years before. Just as the Block Schools were governed by parents rather than professional educators, YAP was set up to be governed by young people. When YAP's founders obtained funding, they naturally asked the Block Schools to sponsor YAP. The philosophy of community development and grassroots leadership was the same.

YAP's organizers started by asking groups of teenagers what they liked about East Harlem, and what they would try to change in their community if adults would back them up. Ideas and energy burst forth.

Within one year, seven major projects were underway, a quarter of a million dollars had been raised from the Federal government, and seven adult organizers had been selected by the young people to help turn their ideas into reality.

One of the first projects was the gut rehabilitation of an abandoned City-owned building. The young people who started this project had rescued 17 homeless dogs and were trying to care for them in an abandoned building. When they heard from Chantay Jones, a 14-year-old YAP volunteer that they could get an adult to help them, they joined YAP and selected David Calvert as their organizer. With his help they embarked on a five-year adventure to rehabilitate a building, this time to create housing for homeless people.

When this building was completed, the young people said they wanted other young people around the City to have the same opportunity. They knew that young people everywhere wanted to rebuild their communities and to provide beautiful housing for their families, friends, and neighbors.

"There's a lot of love in the Youth Action Program, and someday we're going to spread it around the world."

Victor Ortiz
YAP volunteer, at age 19

So the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars was born. Hundreds of young people and agency directors from all five boroughs joined forces with YAP to express our communities' vision and need to the City Council. As a result, there are now 22 city-funded youth employment programs and nine projects in which young people rehabilitate abandoned buildings to provide housing for the homeless, while going to school half-time themselves.

Meanwhile, YAP's other seven initial projects also went forward, each with its own fascinating history and internal dynamic, leading to the list of concrete achievements described above.

We have had a joyous, tumultuous, painful, inspiring, and loving ten years. It is easy to liberate great energy, brilliant ideas, and deep love. It is harder to overcome poverty, depression, internalized oppression, and the cumulative effects of racism and institutional failure. Sometimes we despair. But always we are resilient; we rejoice whenever an individual succeeds, and whenever our united effort to improve life in our community prevails.

"It's sad that we as Spanish and Black children put ourselves down. But it's not our fault. It's a reflection of how society operates. It can be changed. We are already involved in changing it, because we understand it, and we care. That's why I want to join with everybody to build a community based on love! ... Love is a strong force, the force that shall dominate the world if it is liberated."

Johnny Rivera
YAP staff member, at age 19

FUNDING

The volunteers who founded YAP had been at work for only eight months when we succeeded in raising $250,000 from the Carter Administration's Community Crime Prevention Program in 1978. We were off to a flying start. A year and a half later we won another Federal demonstration grant of $500,000 to mount an exemplary youth employment program. After one more national demonstration grant, the Federal spigot was closed by the Reagan administration in 1983.

For two years, survival became the curriculum of our program. Fundraising teams of young people and staff had to write, talk, testify, and organize to get State, City, and private funds to make up for lost Federal funds. Negotiating the political maze, breaking into closed systems, challenging entrenched interests, and persisting despite disappointments taught us a lot. Our survival and expansion through those lean years came from a mix of the eloquence of young people, the commitment of staff, and the very long hours put in by administrators.

Despite the fact that Federal funding was never reinstated, revenues and expenditures are now up to 2 million dollars a year, including bricks and mortar for housing rehabilitation. Twenty percent of our funding now comes from the State, 45% from the City, and 35% from private sources.

LEADERSHIP

At the core of YAP's leadership, there have always been about forty people, young people and adults together, who have actively taken responsibility. Many young people have given several key years of their lives to volunteering and working at the Youth Action Program, because they cared, and because they were learning. Mentioning names is risky because there are so many who should be included; but not to mention anybody would be wrong. A few young people who stand out in our memories for the length, intensity, and decisive value of their involvement are: Chantay Jones, Victor Ortiz, Freddy Acosta, Kenny Cox, Tony Minor, Darryl Gibbs, Eric Brown, Jerry and Bob Stapleton, Peter Tyson, Richard Malavet, Chris Bell, Rose Parilla, Juan Ortega, Junior Arizmendi, John Sainz, Francisco Diaz, Johnny Rivera, Nancy Veintidos, Humberto Lopez, David Nieves, Ismael Nunez, Maximo Hernandez, Winston Sweetie, William Nazario, Windskey Santiago, Rey Hernandez, and Maria Motta.

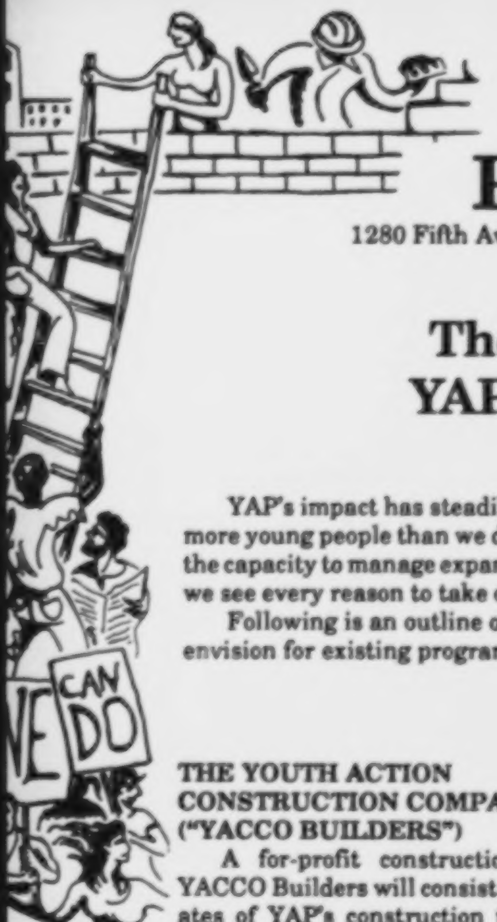
"If you're not really dedicated, if you're not really committed to making things better in the future, you don't belong here. Nothing will change if we don't do it for ourselves. Our parents can't do it for us, nobody can."

Nancy Veintidos
YAP staff member, at age 18

Many staff members and administrators also have given years of remarkable service. Milo Stanojevich, David Calvert, Delia Delgado, Sonia Bu, Carla Precht, Mercedes Rodriguez, Ines Brignoni, Barbara Oakley, Eddie Bourbon, German Tejeda, Cheryl Harden, Claude Vincent, Spencer Strong, Valerie Shell, Ralph Madera, Ivan Braithwaite, Ubaka Hill, Lou Grant, Tony Figueroa, Maria Rivera, Smiley Capblanca, and Dorothy Stoneman have all made important and extended contributions. The common labor for a common vision creates a community of hope and love.

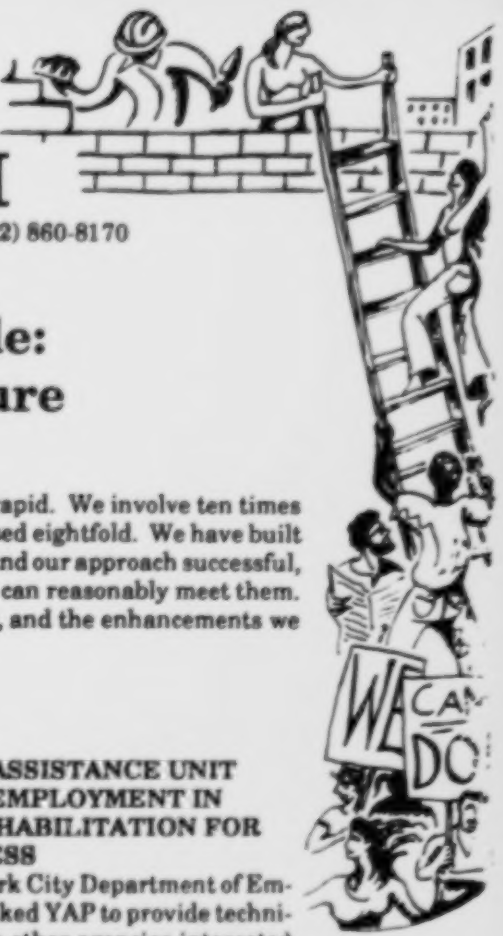
"I think it's important that you know, I love you people with all my heart. May we be a family forever and ever."

Connie Davidson
construction graduate, age 20



YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM

1280 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10029 ♦ (212) 860-8170



The Second Decade: YAP Plans the Future

YAP's impact has steadily increased; our growth has been rapid. We involve ten times more young people than we did in 1978. Our budget has increased eightfold. We have built the capacity to manage expansion. Since the need is enormous, and our approach successful, we see every reason to take on new challenges as quickly as we can reasonably meet them.

Following is an outline of the new projects we are planning, and the enhancements we envision for existing programs.

THE YOUTH ACTION CONSTRUCTION COMPANY ("YACCO BUILDERS")

A for-profit construction company, YACCO Builders will consist of the graduates of YAP's construction training program subcontracting for demolition, carpentry, sheetrocking, painting, and finishing work. This will enable the graduates to stay together as a productive unit and provide jobs for subsequent graduates as the company expands.

The workers will be paid a wage by the company. Profits will be divided annually according to a point system reflecting each individual's work hours. On-going governance will be in the hands of the workers; YAP will retain legal control and responsibility for fiscal management.

Pro bono legal assistance is being provided by the law firm of Debevoise and Plimpton; *pro bono* accounting services by Arthur Young.

Estimated first year start-up costs: $100,000

> ***"We can't have any laggards or slackards on this project, because we'll be dealing with big money and we'll have to build a reputation."***
>
> ***Tyrone Bland***
> ***Policy Committee member***

◆◆◆

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UNIT FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN HOUSING REHABILITATION FOR THE HOMELESS

The New York City Department of Employment has asked YAP to provide technical assistance to other agencies interested in training young people in housing rehabilitation. We have also been sought out by groups in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Burlington, Vermont.

Estimated one-year budget: $50,000

◆◆◆

NATIONAL ADVOCACY FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN HOUSING REHABILITATION FOR THE HOMELESS

It was YAP's active constituency-building and communication that persuaded New York City officials to fund youth employment in housing rehabilitation. Now, youth groups, housing groups, and advocates for the homeless around the country are interested. YAP, and the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars, are ideally situated to coordinate an advocacy effort for a national program of youth employment in housing rehabilition for the homeless.

Estimated two-year budget: $100,000

"When I joined YAP, doors opened to me that I never knew existed. I met people who cared. Then I realized the doors were closing behind me, and my friends were being locked out. There should be more programs like YAP, for other people like me."

Peter Tyson
construction trainee
at the 1985 City budget hearings

◆◆◆

TRAINING IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR OTHER AGENCIES

Over the past two years YAP has been approached by more than two dozen agencies, to provide training for their staff and young people in program design and leadership development.

Given our resources, we have said "yes," as often as possible, but demand now requires that some staff members devote themselves primarily to training people from other programs.

Estimated two-year budget: $100,000

"YAP is a learning experience. Everybody should experience it. You have to be there to believe it. It's a place where young people talk and their ideas are implemented and they become tangible. YAP does that as a constant thing. Nobody else does that. Everybody else calls us the 'kids' and doesn't listen. I hope YAP never dies. I wish other programs could learn from YAP."

Sonia Texidor, YAP graduate

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN CHILD CARE FOR "BOARDER" BABIES

Young people have expressed strong interest in helping the homeless babies of our community. Similar to building housing, caring for babies will have a permanent effect on the future.

The program will operate along the same lines as YAP's other employment programs, with trainees dividing their time equally between academic remediation and work. They will receive intensive, closely supervised training in infant care while working in hospitals or group homes with abandoned babies and toddlers.

Estimated annual budget: $200,000

"I don't want to see babies 'in the streets.' I know what it feels like to be there. I'm against there being homeless babies anywhere. Let's help them."

Isaac Gary
Policy Committee member

◆◆◆

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN HOUSING REHABILITATION: EXPANSION

Two years of stable funding from New York City and State, as well as from private foundations, has allowed YAP to refine the program design and to develop a strong staff for this project. We are consequently ready to speed up the process of rebuilding abandoned buildings. We hope to be working on three buildings simultaneously by 1989, providing training for additional young people and creating more housing for low income people.

Estimated budget: $1,500,000

"There's a problem in our community and all over New York City. There's not enough housing for poor people. All we see is condos and coops. What are we going to do if the rich people take over us? Where are we going to go? Where are we going to stay?

Just because we're poor doesn't mean we don't have powers. We're also human beings. We have to fight for what's right. We want housing for poor people."

Rey Hernandez
Policy Committee member

ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR YAP MEMBERS

Follow-through and advocacy for every individual's success in school has emerged as a real need throughout the Youth Action Program. We plan to hire a staff member to act as liaison with the schools, to coordinate tutoring programs and preparation for special exams. This Educational Coordinator would work closely with the Life Planning Counselor already on staff.

Estimated budget: $35,000

"Just because YAP treats us as if we were already educated, we can't kid ourselves. We need that education. We can't stay at YAP all our lives. We have to face the rest of the world where they don't respect people just because they're human."

German Tejeda
Policy Committee member

◆◆◆

THE EAST HARLEM YOUTH AGENDA FOR THE NINETIES

In 1980-1982, YAP organized a series of leadership conferences culminating in a Youth Agenda for the Eighties, which served as the basis for all our subsequent work. Before 1990, the process should be repeated, in order to have an accurate and broad expression of young people's priorities for the next decade.

Estimated budget: $30,000

"Good leadership means listening to other people, finding out what they think should be done and helping them do it."

report from youth leaders
at YAP's 1987 leadership retreat

◆◆◆

UPGRADING OF THE PLAYGROUND ON 103RD STREET

In 1981 YAP built a small park and playground on East 103rd Street. The park now requires upgrading and on-going maintenance. It is very popular with neighborhood children, but needs trees, grass, and more equipment, including a half-size basketball court.

Estimated annual budget: $ 8,000
Estimated capital budget: $40,000

STUDENT GOVERNMENT PROGRAM: EXPANSION

With YAP's help, student governments are elected in four local junior high schools each year. They engage the entire school in an assessment of how the school could be improved, and lobby for their proposed improvements with teachers, administrators, parents, and the school board. Simultaneously, they implement whatever improvements are within their own powers.

Officials of the East Harlem School District have now asked us to organize student governments in other schools. As a result, YAP plans to organize student governments in two additional schools in 1988, hopefully expanding to every junior high school in the district within four years.

YAP will also bring the student government officers from each school together in the East Harlem Student Government Association to work for common issues district-wide.

Estimated budget for 1988-89 expansion:
$40,000

"The key issue for improving our schools is to improve the relationships between teachers and students. We can best do this by creating some dialogue between them. The way to get dialogue is to give students some input into how the school is run, so they can talk to the teachers and administrators. We recommend student governments to be organized in all the schools."

from the recommendations of
150 students attending YAP's 1983
Youth Conference on School Improvement

◆◆◆

SIX-YEAR FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT FOR STUDENT GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Eighty students have been selected by their peers as leaders in their student governments. We would like to apply the principles of the "I Have A Dream" Program to long-term follow-up with these young leaders who might otherwise get lost as they are dispersed to high schools all over New York City. They are a community resource which needs to be nurtured. The goal would be college for all of them, and continuation of leadership development throughout high school. A college scholarship would be promised, and a project organizer would develop follow-up programs, including continued involvement in city-wide school improvement efforts.

We seek an individual or institutional sponsor for these students.

Estimated six-year budget: $360,000

◆◆◆

A NEW FACILITY FOR YAP'S HEADQUARTERS

For several years developers have been trying to buy the site now occupied by YAP at 1280 Fifth Avenue. They would like to build condominiums there. We have resisted, and are now negotiating with the Terence Cardinal Cooke Health Care Center to build low income housing and a nursing home on our site. If this agreement is reached, new headquarters for YAP will be built into the complex, but YAP must still raise funds for its interior.

Estimated cost: $200,000, 3 years hence

AN INSTITUTE FOR FUTURE POLITICAL LEADERS

Looking ahead several years, we envision a long-term program for young adults, to develop political leaders from Black, Latin and other low income communities. This program may include a leadership institute, internships with political leaders, academic training, travel, or other relevant experience.

Estimated annual budget: $200,000

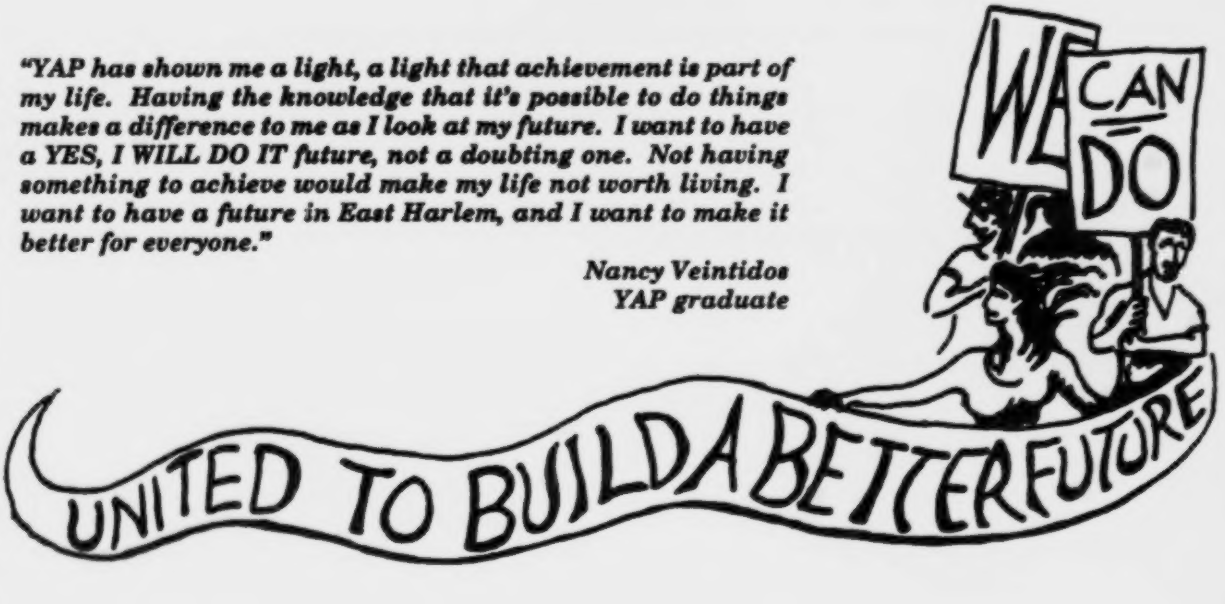
◆◆◆

The above plans will increase our annual budget by two million dollars over the next three years.

Of course, some of these ideas may be replaced by others with greater urgency or promise, but the scale and emphases are likely to remain the same.

All of our plans depend on acquiring additional support from new sources in the public and private sectors, as well as committed staff members and caring young people who are eager to open their hearts to the possibility of a better future.

> *"YAP has shown me a light, a light that achievement is part of my life. Having the knowledge that it's possible to do things makes a difference to me as I look at my future. I want to have a YES, I WILL DO IT future, not a doubting one. Not having something to achieve would make my life not worth living. I want to have a future in East Harlem, and I want to make it better for everyone."*
>
> *Nancy Veintidos*
> *YAP graduate*


WE
CAN
DO
UNITED TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

YAP is a division of the East Harlem Block Nursery, Inc.

BASIC IDEAS ABOUT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

* Why Leadership Development
* The Role of Adults in Developing Youth Leaders
* Developing a Concept of Good Leadership
* "Leadership" Not "Empowerment"
* Seven Essential Elements of Leadership Development

WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Our focus on leadership development is driven by two parallel facts: the society has a pressing need for more good leaders at every level; and the challenge to take leadership is an excellent way of engaging the hearts and minds of young people.

Programs which are motivated by concern for the "pathologies" of the young people, or by fear of what impact large numbers of unemployed and undereducated young adults could have on society, are unlikely to touch the wellspring of love, hope, and positive energy which lies deep inside all our young people.

Young people have unacknowledged and untapped potential which must be fully respected before any youth program of any type will be effective. They are brilliantly intelligent, and the society has failed to enlist and develop this intelligence. That is our job. When we do it, leaders emerge. When good leaders emerge, humanity's potential is enhanced.

Young people who are poor, or who belong to a national minority, generally have had their intelligence invalidated over and over again. Therefore the program must immediately validate their intelligence in the most dramatic way possible, to begin the process of recovery from past invalidations. Offering leadership in the program, real involvement in significant decision-making, is a powerful and immediate antidote to the feeling of being insignificant and dumb.

Further, for young people to invest themselves fully in any productive activity, it must be an important activity. Taking leadership for a better community, and joining an organization that itself takes leadership for a better world, catches the imagination of the young people and has the power to inspire them to give their best. Simultaneously, it increases their self-respect and their resulting commitment to take responsibility for their own lives.

20

Virtually all young people have a clear perception of what is wrong in the world and vivid ideas for constructive change; they lack only the confidence and skills to carry them out. We **NEED** their ideas and their energy. We therefore must provide them with the confidence and the skills, as well as a value system, that will enable them to become good leaders.

A desperate need for effective and ethical leaders exists in every community, in every neighborhood, in every country. Fortunately, the natural resource to meet this need exists in abundant supply, if we would only put our attention on its development.

There is also a short-term need that is persuasive for making leadership development a core concept in any youth program: every school and program currently run by adults for young people would be substantially improved if young people had a voice in policy, program, and staffing decisions. Their ideas about what ought to be done, when coupled with the experience of the adults, inevitably lead to a program or a school which is more on target, more appropriate, more effective.

This is true not only because the young people's ideas reflect a perspective usually absent from adult discussion, thus correcting some distortion usually guiding the adults' decisions, but also because the identification with the program achieved through participation in decision-making, itself makes the program more effective for the young people involved.

It is shocking how rarely adults consult seriously with young people about the institutions affecting them. Partly as a result, we adults have failed, in remarkable measure, to produce institutions and programs that meet the needs of youth.

WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?

Leadership development is our emphasis because

1) The society needs more ethical and effective leaders.

2) Every youth program and school would itself be improved if governed with real input from young people.

3) Leadership can engage young people intensely and deeply, liberating their best energies.

4) Real decision-making responsibility can heal the two deepest wounds of our young people:

   - low self-esteem due to consistent invalidation of their intelligence;

   - feelings of powerlessness, and its companion anger, due to being raised in a thoroughly adult-dominated world, which has not listened to the ideas of the young people.

THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN DEVELOPING YOUTH LEADERS

Adults play the key role in identifying, nurturing, educating, encouraging, counseling, advising, and inspiring young leaders.

There is no point in underestimating or understating the importance of adults. The dominance of adults as authorities in our society and as the givers of approval is thoroughgoing. There is also a widespread shortage of adults who are available for real friendships with young people. There is a yearning among young people, often unconscious, for a relationship with an adult who could be trusted with confidential information, who could lend a hand, provide guidance and reassurance, and lift adolescent depression with caring confidence.

An adult who possesses authority, gives approval, and becomes a real friend to a young person has unexpected influence. Adults are frequently surprised at how little intervention it takes to establish a significant relationship in which they are embraced as a "mother," "father," or "mentor."

How Rare It Is

Most of us who are now adults can count on one hand, if indeed we can count anybody at all, those grown-ups outside our immediate family who took a personal interest in us. The teacher, minister, professor, social worker, god-parent, friend of the family, neighbor, or coach who noticed and took time, who welcomed and praised us, who offered us a home telephone number, who took us aside for a personal conversation, who invited us to her home - these unusual people and events stand out in our memories. This is an indication of how important our personal involvement is to the young people we care about.

Check Our Motives

It is important, therefore, that we check our motives at the outset. If we are genuinely and thoroughly committed to the full development of the young people, because we love seeing people blossom and flower, and because we are committed to contributing to a better world for all people, we are on a right and safe track. But if we are seeking personal gratification, somehow needing to be important to somebody, or close to somebody ourselves, or needing to help somebody whom we imagine to be in the same predicament we were in as young people, we need to be careful. Our own emotional needs should not be prominent in a mentor relationship. And if we are hopeful of recruiting young people to our own religion or ideology or subculture, we should abandon that idea. It is an unfair imposition on an open-minded young person.

DEVELOPING A CONCEPT OF GOOD LEADERSHIP

Good Leaders and Bad Leaders

There are, we must admit at the outset, good leaders and bad leaders. We are not referring here to people who lead well and people who lead poorly. Rather, we are referring to people who lead in a way that benefits humanity and people who lead in a way that is destructive to humanity.

Of course, there are differences of opinion about this, and it is definitely a value judgment we are making. This value judgment must be made, and it must be raised for consideration by the young people. The classic examples are Martin Luther King, on the one hand, and Adolf Hitler on the other. Both were clearly effective leaders, but one was redemptive and one destructive. A reading of Hitler's book, Mein Kampf, reveals that he certainly thought he was leading for the good of the world as he saw it, and so, apparently, did his followers. One must assume that bad leaders believe in what they are doing. The power of human beings to rationalize is very great. Thus we must have our own criteria for judging good leadership.

Making Things Go Right

In the broadest and simplest terms, good leadership is caring enough to make things go right. In any situation, the people who care enough to put out the effort to make this conversation, this meeting, this family dinner, this relationship, this organization, this block, this union, this legislature, this movement, this country, this world. . . go right, are good leaders. They emerge as leaders, because other people recognize and appreciate the effort, and many of them are yearning for the results of that effort and are eager to find other people they trust so they can throw their own weight toward making things go right.

Meeting Rational Human Needs

What does it mean to make things "go right"? It means that people emerge from that situation having more of their rational needs met than before. Rational needs for all of us include the following:

- safety from abuse, violence, and exploitation;
- food and shelter;
- good health;
- attention to our thinking, our pain, and our potential;
- opportunities to learn new things;
- close human relationships;
- meaningful work;
- resources to care for the people we love;
- the chance to see beauty around us;
- belonging to something that represents our highest beliefs.

Anyone who provides these things to individuals, and who influences the world toward providing them to larger and larger numbers of people, emerges as a leader, as a GOOD leader.

But there's only so much one individual can do alone. Good leadership requires engaging a group of people in the process. This leads to an expanded definition of good leadership:

> To care enough to put out the effort every moment to make things go right through loving people and through guiding the group - whatever group - toward using its fullest power to meet the rational needs of everyone it touches.

Guiding a Group

The reference to guiding the group needs expansion. How does a leader guide a group? What are the functions he must perform in order to guide a group? Following is a useful list:

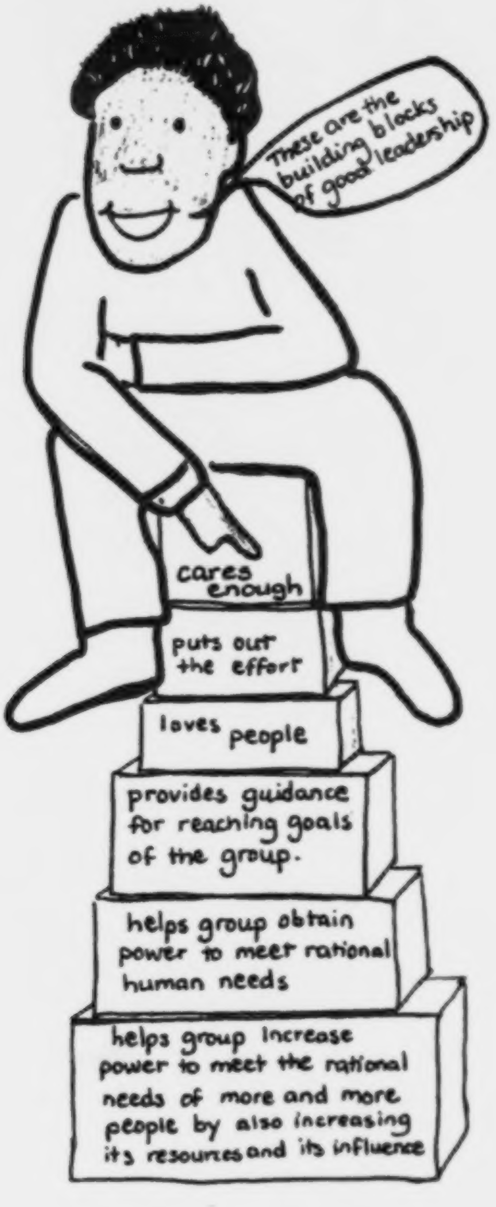
- help the group define its program and goals, by listening to all the ideas and synthesizing them in a form acceptable to the group;
- keep an eye on the long range goal, and relate the short-term activities to it;
- help develop good policies and insure that they are implemented;
- create a situation in which people can do their best work;
- increase the awareness of all group members of the over-all needs of the larger group so that individuals and sub-groups do not speak for their narrow interests but care about the whole;
- keep the different individuals and sub-groups in good communication with each other;
- make a distinction between the objective needs of a group and the emotional wants of a group, between clear thinking and emotionalism;
- help the group get things done - sometimes by organizing the work, sometimes by doing important chunks of the work, sometimes by helping others complete their part;
- help the group function as a group - drawing out the ideas of individuals, listening to each other, solving problems, giving each other support and feedback.

Increasing the Group's Impact

When a group is functioning well - reaching its goals and objectives, supporting the contribution of each member and sub-group, and trying reasonably successfullly to meet the rational needs of the human beings it touches - then it's important to increase the impact of the group by increasing its power and resources. This then becomes a key function of leadership, in order to meet the rational needs of more people.

The general definition is thus expanded once again, as follows:

> A good leader cares enough to put out the effort to make things go right through loving people and guiding the group - whatever group - toward using its fullest power to meet the rational needs of everyone it touches, and taking the responsibility to increase the power of the group through increasing its resources and its influence, as long as it continues to be committed to the well-being of all people.


These are the building blocks of good leadership
cares enough
puts out the effort
loves people
provides guidance for reaching goals of the group.
helps group obtain power to meet rational human needs
helps group increase power to meet the rational needs of more and more people by also increasing its resources and its influence

Developing New Leaders

As most of us know all too well, increasing the influence and resources of a group usually includes fundraising, hiring and supporting good staff, working on visible issues.

Equally important, it includes developing new leaders at the fastest possible rate. No group can increase its influence unless it has an expanding group of leaders able to take significant responsibility.

This brings us back to the purpose of this manual: to help staff and administrators in youth programs more effectively exercise their own leadership roles, in particular that part of their role which is developing the leadership capabilities of the young people in their programs and schools. Developing new leaders is a key function of any leader.

Suggested Process for Defining Good Leadership

The best way to proceed with young people is to raise the issue of good leadership and bad leadership and ask for examples of both, and then have the group develop their own criteria. Any group of young people will come up with a significant definition of good leadership, including both the functions and the qualities of a good leader.

A simple outline of a workshop format to use with young people exploring these issues is described in the section called "A Process for Defining Leadership" (p.79).

"LEADERSHIP" NOT "EMPOWERMENT"

In a deliberate fashion, we avoid use of the word "empowerment" as the goal of what we do. Despite the fact that it is an important concept, we have found that emphasizing it can backfire in practice.

If giving people power is thought to be the purpose of the program, it can foster the false idea that power is a worthy end in itself. Power as a goal is not useful. People think they understand what power is, so they know when they have it and when they don't. If having power is the primary basis for evaluating what's going on, you can get all sorts of distortions and abuses of power. Challenging power-grabbing patterns is difficult when you have used the rhetoric of empowerment.

We prefer to speak of leadership development. This forces the program to answer the question, What is leadership? Further, what is GOOD leadership? At first, young people tend to act as if leadership were simply speaking one's mind in a persuasive way. But, if asked, they will develop a more sophisticated and useful concept of leadership. The concept of leadership development is less easily appropriated to justify the self-interested domination of other people than is the concept of empowerment.

When Is it Good For People to Have Power?

When you do discuss issues of power, one of the concepts we find useful is the test of "The Three M's." The Three M's are Motivation, Mission, and Methods.

If a leader's MOTIVATION is deep caring for the well-being of other people; if his MISSION is to improve the well-being of humanity; if his METHODS are those which enhance the physical, moral, psychological, and intellectual status of all the people they touch and if he does not rationalize destructive methods for a supposed positive goal, then it's all right for that person to have power. On the other hand, if his motivation is personal prestige, his mission to get rich, and his method merciless competition, his having power will probably not serve to meet the rational needs of other people. This, of course, could be elaborated in discussion more fully.

"A man who won't die for something is not fit to live."

Martin Luther King

We have also used another measure to decide if people should have power in the short run. We assume that it is good for people who have never before had power to be given an unexpected amount of power. This experience reverses that part of past mistreatment which is specifically disempowerment based on the prejudice that certain people are incapable of thinking clearly about complicated subjects, and incapable of taking responsibility for the welfare of other people. The principle of giving unexpected power to such groups applies not only to young people, but to any disenfranchised group in any neighborhood or institution. It will almost always improve the quality of thinking about the issues at hand to have the input of the people previously excluded.

This assumption and this structure do create, in reality, empowerment, even though we choose not to glorify the word. The empowerment will be very beneficial if it is handled thoughtfully. It will have the most profound and lasting effect if it is coupled with training focused on the Mission, the Motivations, and the Methods of the developing leaders on whom power is bestowed.

Sharing Power

Some people will argue that power is never bestowed; it must always be fought for and won. In our experience, a structure of youth governance does appropriately bestow power on the people who have most at stake in the success of the program, and have previously been excluded. Anyone with power has the obligation to consider how to use his power to improve the balance of power in his organization or community. The process of sharing power is, in fact, one of the functions of good leadership.

THE SEVEN ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

We have identified seven essential elements in the process of developing leaders:

1) COUNTERACTING THE EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION
2) NURTURING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
3) TEACHING LEADERSHIP SKILLS
4) PROVIDING THE EXPERIENCE OF SUCCESS
5) EDUCATING ABOUT THE WORLD
6) RESOLVING PERSONAL HANG-UPS AND CORRECTING ACADEMIC DEFICIENCIES
7) ORGANIZING TO HAVE IMPACT ON THE WORLD

The rest of this manual is organized around these elements, with each element providing the title of a section.

While this booklet has been written from experience with inner-city North American youth, the above elements, and the underlying theory, are applicable, with slightly different emphases, to working with all groups of young people, and, probably, to all groups of oppressed people of any age.

Element One

COUNTERACTING THE EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION

- Definition of Oppression
- Liberation from Past and Present Oppression
- Adultism
- Recognizing Internalized Oppression
- Eliminating Internalized Oppression
- Racial and Cultural Identity: A Workshop Format

DEFINITION OF OPPRESSION

We are using the word "oppression" to mean the systematic mistreatment or control of an identifiable group of people, in ways which are reinforced by social institutions, laws, customs, and attitudes.

The Oppression of Young People

Young people have been consistently treated as if they were less important than adults. Their ideas have been assumed to be less valuable, and their feelings less valid, than those of adults. Their rights to make decisions have been largely denied; the details of their lives have been subject to incredible control from parents and the keepers of all kinds of institutions, but especially schools. They have been vulnerable to punishments and abuses of all types. They have extremely limited legal rights, and are generally treated as if they were the possessions of their parents.

Racial or Ethnic Invalidations

Young people who are also members of a racial or cultural minority in our society carry a double or triple load of oppression. Not only as young people, but also as Black people, or poor people, or Latin people, or Italian people, or whatever type of people they are, they have been invalidated and insulted, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. These insults have left their marks, sometimes very deep and damaging scars. Some groups in our society are more thoroughly and cruelly mistreated than others. Working with the youth of these groups requires awareness of how, specifically, they have been demeaned.

Denied Access

Further, beyond invalidations, many groups have been denied access to certain benefits and opportunities in the society. Education, employment, housing, money, beauty, and health care have been unequally available to different population groups. This is another form of what we are calling oppression. This type of denial has been experienced particularly by people of color and poor people.

Survival Requirements

Still a third form is comprised of those things a person is forced to do to survive, or to be accepted. For example, young men, while not invalidated for being men and not deprived of benefits and opportunities as men, are victims of this third form of consistent mistreatment. They have to prove they're not "wimps." This usually means they have to suppress any expression of vulnerability, stiffen themselves to battle, and learn how to function on top of their fear, without acknowledging it. This leads to extraordinary isolation, the abandonment of expectations for closeness and trust. This is typically men's oppression, regardless of class or race, but it is accentuated in some communities, and accentuated in countries at war.

In summary, we are considering the oppression of a particular group to be the typical invalidations, the consistent denial of certain aspects of equality, and the common requirements that people act in a distorted way in order to survive or be accepted. This combination of invalidations, inequalities, and acceptance requirements makes up the general picture of oppression for any population group.

LIBERATION FROM PAST AND PRESENT OPPRESSION

Program Must Counteract Oppression

It is the job of the youth program to counteract these elements of oppression to the best of its ability. For young people to develop as leaders, they must experience liberation from the oppression they have experienced in the past.

Leadership development is the process of liberating people from the current reality of oppression and healing the scars from their past mistreatment, by providing them with experiences which counteract the invalidations, eliminate the inequality, and remove the distorted acceptance requirements.

The first job of people working with youth is to figure out how to do that. But it isn't so hard to figure it out. We need only look at the particular forms of oppression and chart a path which is in direct opposition to those forms. If we don't know what the particular forms are for any group, we need only ask members of the group.

As an example, let's think about young Black men.

As young people they have been denied full respect for their ideas. As men they have been denied full respect for and access to their emotions. As Black people they have been denied equal access to education, employment, housing, and justice. As Black youth they have been depicted as dangerous, idle, socially disruptive, or worthless. As working-class Black people they have been assumed to be unintelligent. As young people they have been denied any power over their institutions or their families or their communities; as Black and working class or poor people they notice that their parents are similarly denied any power, so they look forward to powerlessness as adults.

The job of liberation is clear: set up a context in which young Black men are fully respected as decision-makers, have control over the program, have access to education and employment and housing, are doing work which is extremely valuable to society, and have opportunities to make deep emotional contact with other people, especially other young men, sharing the sources of pain and their intelligent vision for a better world.

By doing this kind of assessment for each constituent group, a youth project can purposely design its program to suit the precise needs of its members.

A more general approach may also suffice. Our young people have lived in relative poverty and powerlessness in an affluent society which values wealth and power, and which has given them litle respect, little opportunity, little of importance to do, and has not cared enough to protect them from the temptations of drugs, from the physical decay of their environment, from the breakdown of their families and overwork of their parents, and even from homelessness and hunger.

To succeed to the maximum extent, a program must dramatically reverse this past experience. It should bear no resemblance to the institutions and attitudes that have so far disappointed and hurt our young people.

Positive Elements

It must, therefore, include the following positive elements, in direct opposition to past mistreatment:

- profound respect for their intelligence;
- power for them over their immediate environment;
- protection from disaster;
- meaningful and important work;
- real, patient caring for their development;
- actual teaching of skills;
- consistently positive values;
- family-like support and appreciation from peers and adults;
- understanding of the proud and unique history of their people;
- heightened awareness of the present-day world and their important place in it;
- a path to future opportunity;
- real concern and action from the agency about changing the conditions that have affected them and the people they love.

ADULTISM

by John Bell

If we are to be successful in our work with young people, we have to tackle the pervasive existence of "adultism." We use the word adultism to mean all those behaviors and attitudes which flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people in myriad ways without their agreement.

Raising this may make us uncomfortable, because we will be challenging some deep-rooted attitudes toward young people that we take for granted but which turn out to be oppressive and counterproductive.

If you think of it, you will realize that except for prisoners and a few other institutionalized groups, young people's lives are more controlled than those of any other group in society. Most young people are told what to eat, what to wear, when to go to bed, when they can talk, that they will go to school, which friends are OK, and when they are to be in the house. Most young people have little or no control of money; their opinions are not valued; they are punished at the will or whim of adults; their emotions are considered "immature."

In addition, adults reserve the right to punish, threaten, hit, take away "privileges," and ostracize young people when they consider it beneficial in controlling them or "disciplining" them. Children are, by and large, considered the possessions of their parents, much as women used to be considered the possessions of their husbands, and Black slaves the possessions of their White "masters."

If this were a description of the way a group of adults were treated, we would all easily agree that their oppression were almost total. But the adult world does not consider this treatment of young people as oppressive because we are soaked with it ourselves. We were treated in much the same way. For this reason we need to hold adultism up to a strong light.

The Heart of It

The essence of adultism is that the young person is disrespected. Young people are considered to be less important and in a sense inferior to adults. They cannot be trusted to develop correctly, so they must be taught, disciplined, harnessed, punished, and guided into the adult world.

Examples of Adultism: Common Statements

Consider how the following comments are essentially disrespectful. What are the assumptions behind each of them? How would a young person hear them?

- "You're so smart for fifteen!"
- "When are you going to grow up?"
- "Don't touch that, you'll break it!"
- "As long as you are in my house, you'll do it!
- "You're being childish."
- "You're so stupid (or clumsy, inconsiderate, etc.)!"
- "Go to your room!"
- "Don't ever yell at your mother like that!" (yelling)
- "She doesn't understand anything." (about a baby)
- "You are too old for that!" or "You're not old enough!"
- "Oh, it's only puppy love."
- "What do you know? You haven't experienced anything!"
- "It's just a stage. You'll outgrow it."

And many, many more!

Common Occurrences

- Of course there is the obvious oppressive treatment: physical and sexual abuse of young people; beating and other physical punishment.

- Then there is the whole range of non-physical punishments or threats: being scolded or yelled at; being intimidated or made to feel guilty; being sent to one's room or "grounded"; being denied love, dinner, privileges.

- There are all the things adults force on young people: food, clothing, bedtime, rules of all kinds, baths, toilet training, schedules, trips.

- Furthermore, if young people protest against their mistreatments, they are often subjected to more punishment.

- Young people are denied control and often even influence over most of the decisions which affect their bodies, their space, and often their possessions.

- Most adults seem to think they can pick up little children or kiss them or pull their cheeks or touch their hair without asking or without its being mutual.

- Most adults can often be seen grabbing things out of children's hands without asking.

- Most young people know that in a disagreement with an adult, their word will not be taken over the adult's.

- Most adults talk "down" to toddlers and other children, as if they could not understand.

- Many young people are ordered to do things or given rules with no explanation.

- Adults, in general, do not really listen to young people, do not take the concerns of young people as seriously as they would an adult's, and have a hard time hearing the thinking of young people as worthy of adult respect, let alone on a par with the quality of adult thinking. Yet young people are expected to listen to adults all the time.

Societal Adultism

- There is a different set of laws for young people. They do not have the same rights as adults, nor the same protections.

- The literature of child development is full of misinformation about young people which severely underestimates what young people are capable of. For example, in one classic textbook used by many students of child development, the author states that the only reason an infant before six months of age cries is because of physical hurts. An infant has no emotional hurts before this age, she says, because "an infant's intelligence has not yet developed the cognitive apparatus which gives rise to emotional responses." Most aware parents know that this is hogwash.

- Generations of young people have grown up with their development limited by cultural biases which consistently underestimate human potential or misunderstand human development. Variations between cultures indicate how little is actually known about the stages of growth. For example, in certain African cultures recently studied, the milestones of sitting, walking, and talking are reached significantly earlier than in the United States.

- The adult world slowly but surely imposes its distress on all young people's natural sense of unity, reverence for life, cooperativeness, exuberant enjoyment, deep connection with people, high expectations, powerfulness, and ability to fully express feelings. Many of us have heard older people say, "Growing up is giving up. You'd better get used to it." It is only the accumulation of disappointments, losses, smashed dreams, unaccepted love, and other such painful experiences which lead adults to say things like that. But it is a crippling attitude that most young people are gradually forced to accept.

- Through the schools in particular, young people are conditioned to accept outside evaluation of their work, their performance, their thinking and, eventually, of themselves.

- There is no socially responsible, productive, and connected role for young people in most societies, certainly not in the United States: few jobs, no real policy-making input, no positions of political power, no high expectations of young people's contributions to society.

- On the other hand, the youth "market" is exploited for profit as the manufacturing and entertainment industries manipulate styles, fads, popularity, and all other aspects of mass culture.

A Mirror

A handy mirror for reflecting what may be adultist behavior is to ask oneself, "Would I treat an adult this way? Would I talk to an adult in this tone of voice? Would I grab this out of an adult's hand? Would I make this decision for an adult? Would I have this expectation for an adult? Would I limit an adult's behavior this way? Would I listen to an adult friend's problem in this same way?" And so on.

A Link to Other Oppressions

Before continuing, we need to raise another important reason for understanding and challenging adultism. The ways we were oppressed as young people have, over time, robbed us of huge amounts of our human power, access to our feelings, confidence in our thinking and ability to act, and enjoyment of living. This constant experience of hurt as a young person conditions us, as we get older, to accept further mistreatment as women, as people of color, as workers, etc. Or it makes us act in oppressive ways toward others in relatively less powerful positions than ours. Men, for example, mistreated as little boys, grow up to mistreat women. White people, disrespected as children, turn the same attitude, embellished with misinformation, on people of color.

Adultism lays the foundation for accepting all the other oppressive relationships. Because every human being has been the victim of adultism, it may be the most pervasive and most difficult form of oppression to challenge and eliminate.

Implications for Our Work With Young People

The liberation of young people from their oppression will require the active participation of adults. The starting place is understanding how we were mistreated and disrespected as children and youth, and how we consequently act in adultist ways now.

As young people develop in their leadership, they will increasingly demand that adults deal with their own adultist attitudes. Adults will need to support each other in changing their ways, listening when the young people point out disrespect, interrupting the adultism which the youth themselves have internalized. When older youth treat younger ones with the same disrespect they have received, it is merely the acting out of internalized adultism.

A few general guidelines might be helpful as we proceed:

- Listen to young people. Really listen. In particular, listen to their thinking, and to their experiences and feelings of what it has been like being young.

- Ask questions. Ask what they think about everything.

- Lay back. Curb our inclination to take over. Support the initiatives of young people.

- Validate their thinking. Welcome their ideas. This is where major invalidation has hurt them.

- Be willing for them to make mistakes. Putting their ideas into practice will bring mixed results. They will learn. We need to learn to support the process of their taking leadership.

- Reverse the power relationships wherever appropriate. When, for example, can we refrain from using our authority, from making the final decision, from being the "real power" behind the youth leadership?

- At the same time, do not thrust young people into decision-making and leadership positions without training and practice and understanding of their responsibilities. Otherwise, we set them up for frustration, confusion, possible failure and humiliation.

- Always respect all young persons, no matter the age, and expect them to respect each other, at all ages. This is the starting point for reversing the internalized oppression.

- Have high expectations of their potentials, and a real assessment of their current abilities. Never sell them short and always be prepared to lend a hand with a difficulty.

- Do not dump our distress about them on them. They get this from adults all the time. It only adds more hurt. We need to take care of our upsets about them some other way with other adults.

- Give young people real information about the way the world works, about our experiences, about relationships and sex, about the contribution of young people to humankind, etc. Never lie to them.

- Be patient with ourselves when we unawarely slip into our old adultist habits. It will take time to undo them. Always appreciate how well we are doing. No blaming ourselves or others.

Good Policy

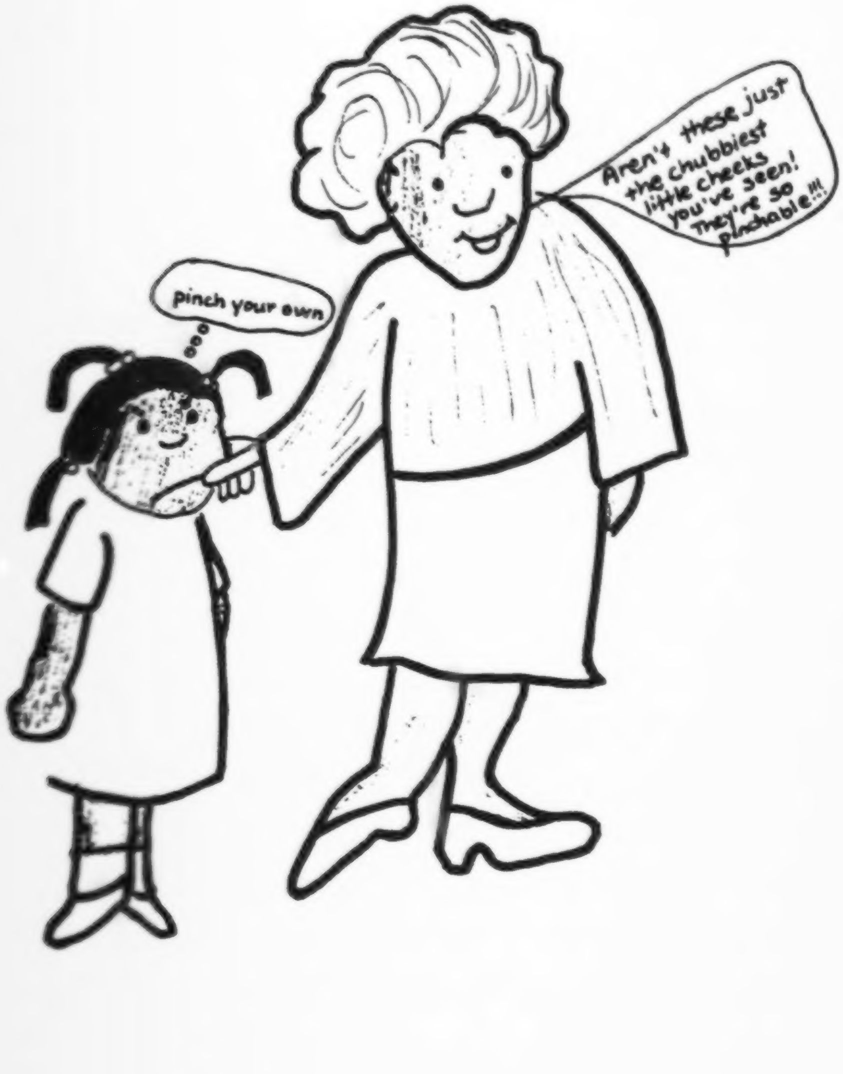
Of course, we want to avoid both the ditch on the one side of adultist authority running the show, and the ditch on the other side of the permissive attitude that says "anything the young people want is OK."

The oppression of young people has left them, to varying degrees, with irrational feelings, tendencies to act out their hurts, and wrong or distorted information. Without clear guidelines, these distresses can wreck any human effort.

A sound policy for behavior in our work together includes expecting all people, despite age:

- to treat each other with nothing less than complete respect;

- to think and not just react;
- to do the thing that will improve the situation;
- to be trustworthy, honest, and reliable in relations with each other;
- to put the interests of the group ahead of one's own;
- to care about each other;
- to struggle against everything which keeps us in conflict among ourselves.


Aren't these just the chubbiest little cheeks you've seen! They're so pinchable!!!
pinch your own

RECOGNIZING INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

One effect of oppression is what we call "internalized oppression." Once people have been coerced to play certain distorted roles, and have been invalidated in certain consistent ways, the effects of this mistreatment can be predictably seen in the attitudes a group of people have toward themselves, and the way they treat each other.

Taking the Mistreatment Inside

People take into themselves the judgments, the invalidations, the negative expectations, and the stereotypical insults. To varying extents, they believe them, and they pass them on to their own children. "There must, indeed, be something wrong with us, or we wouldn't be treated this way," is a classic unconscious adaptation to the illogic and the injustice of discrimination.

Self-hate, self-deprecation, and self-doubt are the results of put-downs that originally came from outside but which have lodged themselves inside a person's psyche.

For generations, people can be forced to accept limits for themselves as simply a part of reality. It takes an awakening, a political or personal realization that the limitations were externally imposed and not genetically or culturally inevitable, for people to resist and to form a new view of themselves. This has happened for many groups, although the internalized oppression takes generations to ferret out and to eliminate, even after the worst of the external oppression has been thrown off.

External Oppression Still Heavy

It is, of course, not so easy for a people to distinguish internalized oppression when there is still vicious mistreatment coming from the outside. The danger still exists and is still real. In the United States, women are still being raped; Black people are still being killed; Jews are still being attacked; homosexuals are still being beaten; Spanish-speaking people are still not being hired.

While the situations have changed and improved, all is not well. So the real and current discrimination must be recognized and opposed, even while trying to free ourselves from the leftover powerlessness, paranoia, and self-deprecation stemming from earlier periods of history when the situation was much worse.

Young People As Victims

The initial awakening of young people has yet to occur. There is minimal understanding of the pervasive mistreatment they are victims of, and little leadership from among the young to resist. The virtual ownership of children by their parents is still unquestioned in society. The rights of parents to control and abuse are barely challenged. All young people receive a nearly lethal dose of powerlessness, and they at least internalize their parents' negative views of them as individuals if they don't happen to be members of a group denigrated by society as a whole.

Among young people of color who are poor, the internalization of self-invalidation and powerlessness is overwhelming, because it is reinforced in all their identities.

Further, people tend to direct at members of their own group the same disapproval, insults, and invalidations they have originally suffered from the outside.

Physical Abuse

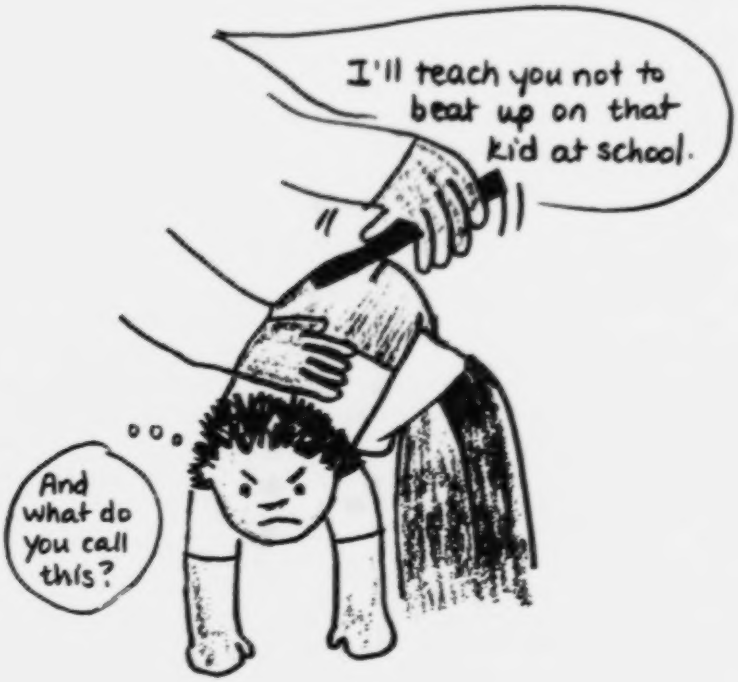
None of this stops at verbal abuse, of course. Those young people who have been victims of physical abuse pass that on to others, often directing violence at their peers, or people weaker than themselves. Last year, in the United States, over 1200 teenagers were killed by other teenagers. Research showed that the perpetrators were generally victims of physical abuse.

Similarly, those groups of people who have been subject to consistent physical abuse as a people tend to pass some version of that mistreatment on to their children. "Beating" children is an accepted form of "discipline" in some cultures. But investigation will show that "disciplining" children through physical abuse originates in a period of history when the adult members of that culture were themselves physically mistreated as an oppressed and powerless group.

Beating Children Doesn't Work

Certainly we know that spankings and beatings do not work - that is, they do not make children happily eager to cooperate with their beloved parents. Beatings may in some circumstances scare young people into compliance, or they may not do too much harm if the general context is a loving one. In that case the children simply internalize the hitting as the proper role for parents, and the chances are they will do it to their own children when they grow up. But since hitting and beating are completely unnecessary to raise wonderful children, it is clear that all hitting and beating of children is a distortion, a mistreatment, that came from individual parents themselves being hit at an earlier stage in their own lives. When it is an approach accepted within a definable culture, one can trace it to the way in which that people was or is oppressed by another people.

The nature of internalized oppression is such that once the negative recording is installed on a people, it plays itself over and over. The external oppression may have stopped or taken a completely different form, but the internalized oppression continues doing its dirty work long after.


I'll teach you not to beat up on that kid at school.
And what do you call this?

ELIMINATING INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

Identifying and Understanding It

Ferreting out the internalized oppression is a long process. It begins by teaching young people what internalized oppression is, and how it operates, and then beginning to identify the forms it takes. When people understand that these negative ideas and behaviors originally came from outside, and can be overcome, it helps. When people understand that the coercion was once pervasive, but isn't any more, and that they are free to live fully in the present, it opens up many possibilities. When we begin to understand that our people are doing to ourselves what used to be done from outside, we begin to try to stop.

A common example of this is the use of the word "nigger" among young people. Staff at Youth Action Program are offended by it, but when they simply say not to do it, the young people respond that it is a term of endearment. Yet everyone understands that it is not a term of endearment because if the white staff members used the term in relation to the young people it would be a profound offense. Getting the young people to stop throwing this term at each other requires explaining its origin and explaining internalized oppression. Then they say, "Oh, O.K. I didn't realize. Now I see. I'll try and stop."

Healing

Understanding is one level. It helps. Another level is healing. Usually healing takes much crying and shaking and raging and sharing of bad feelings we carry about ourselves, and limitations we accept for ourselves, and overwhelming mistreatment we have witnessed. It takes charting a course for ourselves which accepts no limits and which is a truly proud and confident course. Doing this raises much feeling in itself. This process of emotional sharing and catharsis is not an easy one to institute in a youth program. It scares people. The explosive feelings around past hurts are tough to handle if you haven't had a lot of practice and if you haven't shed much of your own painful emotions from the past.

One youth program which has opened this channel very effectively is the Children of War Tour. By creating a context in which teenagers who have grown up in the midst of war share their life stories over and over again with attentive youth audiences, they pull up the pain by the roots. The children of war weep copiously in the month they spend together touring and telling their stories. Their audiences join them, releasing some of their own personal pain once the feelings have been unleashed in empathy with the children of war.

However, sustaining this healing process in an on-going youth program is difficult. We have tried to do it at the Youth Action Program through counseling groups and support groups. But we have a way to go before we can sustain it or generalize it, although those of us who have used it effectively know it is a key part of what we must do. It speeds up and deepens the process of intelligent empowerment. (See chapter on "Support" for more information about the healing process.)

Appreciation and Success

Nothing counteracts self-deprecation as effectively as a combination of being thoroughly embraced and appreciated by other people who cheer us on, and being undeniably successful and successful at achieving our own ever-more-ambitious goals. This requires support in acquiring, step-by-step, the skills and information necessary to succeed, and support in setting those ambitious goals.

It also requires consciously challenging and correcting the misinformation and bad feelings people have internalized about their own cultural, ethnic, sexual, or racial identity.

RACIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:

A Workshop Format

Racial and cultural identity are of enormous importance to each of our young people, yet very little explicit attention is usually given to it. Many adults are afraid to open up these issues. They are too emotion-laden for themselves.

But it is not so difficult to open them up and begin thoughtful and sometimes emotional exploration. Not to do so leaves the young people at the mercy of the negative stereotypes which they pick up automatically in our society.

Workshop Introduction

It works well to raise issues by giving a little background, a few assumptions and concepts, and then by asking questions for people to explore. Following is a sample introduction:

"Part of becoming good leaders, and becoming our best selves, is shedding the negative ideas about ourselves that we have taken in as we grow up. Almost everyone comes into YAP with a lot of bad feelings about themselves. It's not their fault. These bad feelings have been laid on them from the outside. People have put them down. People in their families, in their schools, in the neighborhood, in the police station, in the welfare department, have often put them down verbally or have denied them their rights.

"Today we're going to talk about oppression and identity. Does anyone know what oppression is?

"Right. Oppression is when people are consistently mistreated by society, when they are denied equal opportunities and access to justice, prosperity, education, freedom, and development of their full selves.

"Oppression takes many forms, and it's different for each group of people. The oppression of women is different from that of men. The oppression of Black people is different from that of Puerto Ricans. The oppression of poor people is different from that of rich people. But if you look very closely, and listen deeply to people from every background, you will find that every group of people suffers from some form of systematic mistreatment that tends to force them into a distorted human role. Some forms are more damaging and vicious than others, but almost all people have been forced into some role or position that they would not have freely chosen for themselves.

"For example, from birth, women are told that they must serve men and be ornaments for them; men are told they must fight and be willing to kill without shedding any tears. Black people are told they must work and toil to enrich other people; White people are told they must stick to their own kind or be rejected by them; rich people are told they are stupid and contemptible if they don't continue amassing wealth. Of course, it's different for each individual and family, but in general you can trace certain messages given to every identifiable group in society. People tend to believe these messages and act accordingly. We call this internalized oppression. Because it is taken inside people, it becomes internal to them.

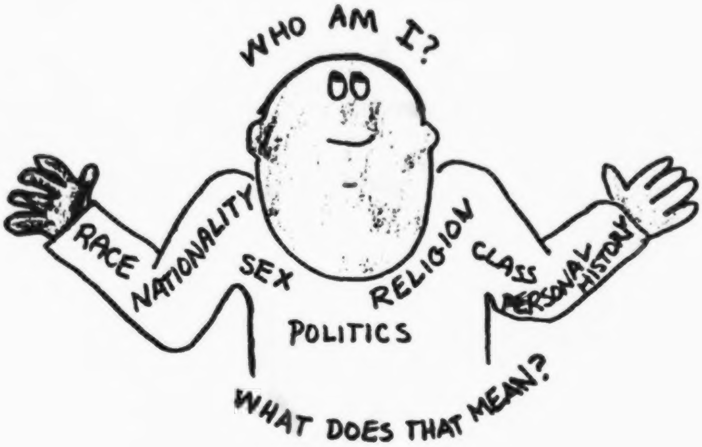
"Then there's external oppression. It comes from the outside. It's when people can't get a job because of the color of their skin or their sex; it's when people get beaten just because they're young; it's when people get lynched or denied housing, or raped, or beaten, or jailed, or kicked out of school for their color, sex, nationality, sexual preference, or political ideas. This is direct external oppression. It is not just a put-down, it's a direct mistreatment coming from outside.

"But all through history, every group has done its best to resist oppression, to fight for its full humanness, to make progress toward justice and equality. Much of human history is really the struggle of oppressed people to gain freedom and equality in societies that are set up in ways that maintain inequality.

"It's important that each of us know our history, and get the information we need to be proud of our own people and to contribute to the on-going human struggle for a better world for everyone. Every one of you comes from a proud history of people struggling to be free, to be strong, to be loving, to make a better world. Some groups have been beaten down by superior force or by vicious trickery, but that doesn't mean they didn't try to resist. It is human to resist mistreatment, and to try to improve the world.

"But to improve it we need to understand who we are, where we come from, what has been done to our people, how we have tried to stand up for ourselves, and how we can change things in the future.

"Let's begin exloring these questions. Each of us has an identity of race, nationality, sex, religion, class, and geography that we carry around with us. Let's each take two or three minutes to share, what is that identity? How do you identify yourself in terms of culture, race, nationality, religion, politics, or whatever figures into your idea of yourself?"



Small Groups - Mixed Identities

After a short go-round in the whole group, it is helpful to get together in small groups of four or five, in which each person has 8 to 15 minutes to share her life history from the point of view of how her identity developed. "How did you learn you were an X? What did your parents teach you about what it meant to be an X? Were you treated in any particular way by society as an X? What was it like to grow up as an X?"

These first small groups should be randomly integrated groups. People are eager to cross the barriers of racial and class prejudice. They want to share their stories with each other. They want to know and be known by people with different backgrounds than their own. Oftentimes they have not had the opportunity to tell their story or hear other people's stories in a deliberate and open way.

It's often good to structure this with ten minutes to tell each story, and five minutes for the group to ask questions. This reassures people that the group is interested, and that they are telling the other people what they actually want to know.

Similar Identity Groups

After people have met in mixed groups and shared their stories, creating a more cohesive whole group, it is useful for people to group together in similar identity groups to answer together the following questions:

- What's great about being x?
- What's been difficult about being x?
- What do we want other people to know about us?

Then a report back to the whole group from each sub-group leads to a greater sense of understanding and diminished fear of discussing these issues. It also leads to greater unity within each identity group. This is desirable and important, because unity with other groups works best when it's based on unity within one's own group.

Reasons for Resistance

Be aware that virtually every group will reveal itself to have members who are quite scared to be divided into like groups. There will almost always be resistance at first. For some Black people it reminds them of segregation, and they don't like it. For some White people who are determined to be good allies of people of color, it focuses them on their whiteness, for which they feel others won't like them. Some people feel least comfortable among groups of people like themselves, because in fact they have been most hurt by the people closest to themselves.

It helps in running this kind of workshop to give lots of latitude for laughter as people are setting up the groups. The leader must never assume what identity group or groups a person belongs in, and should invite from the group a list for the blackboard of all the identity groups which are present in the room. Most people belong to several, and the choice of which one they meet with is full of feeling.

It must be remembered that the development of any limited identity has been imposed by society, and is in itself partly an indication of the effects of oppression, or in its positive side an indication of the group's determination to survive and challenge oppression. There is no reason why every person couldn't have an identity as a human being, citizen of the world, except that we have been forced into more limited ideas of who we are. Some of the narrower identities are delightful, positive, and proud, based on a rich history; but they are also usually attached to perceived roles, expectations, and historical relationships which are rooted in oppression.

Respect Choices of Identity Group

It is, therefore, important that the group leader not continue the imposition from society by insisting or assuming that a person must identify in a certain way, or must choose on this particular day to meet with a particular identity group. For example, a Jew who was raised as a Methodist may not choose to go with the Jewish group; a Puerto Rican who is blonde and was raised with White people may not choose to go with the Latin group; a bi-racial brown-skinned person with a Jewish father may choose to meet with the Jewish group and not the Black group. A dark-skinned Dominican might choose to meet with the Black group instead of the Latin group. These and millions of other choices must be respected and welcomed, all as part of a life-long sorting out of who we really are as human beings.

Of course, the leader must be sensitive to whether a particular group is ready to divide into identity groups. It may be appropriate to have lots of general sharing and repeated grouping into diverse small groups to share many different experiences before people will accept identity groupings. The art of leading is to know what is the right next step for a group to go deeper, get closer, be more thorough and open in their sharing and their discussion and their setting of goals.

Be Prepared for Feelings

A person leading this kind of workshop must also be prepared for the fact that the feelings connected to identity run deep and strong, and when the waters are stirred the feelings will often surface as tears, anger, trembling, or a lot of laughter. This is to be expected, and it's fine. It's not an indication that the group is over its head, or that anything bad is happening. This is just what happens because there is a lot of pain stored in these memories and these enforced identities. The leader needs to be calm and reassuring in her acceptance of feelings. However, if feelings begin to surface in the form of direct emotional attacks on other individuals, these need to be firmly interrupted because they will have negative effects.

The content of this chapter applies equally well to adults and young people, and it is important for adult staff to explore these issues with each other before opening them up with the young people.

Element Two

NURTURANCE

- The Importance of Nurturance
- Communicating Love to Young People
- Personal Friendships with Young People
- Mutual Appreciation
- Self-Estimation
- Systems of Mutual Support

THE IMPORTANCE OF NURTURANCE

Generally speaking, people are not eager to take on responsibility for the well-being of others unless they feel well-cared-for themselves. Furthermore, people learn best from others who love them. It is easiest to take in new information, and be inspired and encouraged, by someone who truly cares about you.

The Highest Compliment

The highest compliment paid to any youth program by its members is, "We're like a family. We treat each other like brothers and sisters." "She's like my mother." "He treats me like a son." "We're like a family."

A program in the South Bronx, called UNITAS, builds on this yearning for familial relationships by explicitly building "symbolic families," in which other children are the "brothers and sisters," teenagers are the "aunts and uncles," older teenagers are the "mothers and fathers," and people in their twenties are the "grandparents." The young people are explicitly taught how to provide nurturance to each other. "Caring attitudes and caring actions" are defined and practiced. Feelings of deprivation are shared so the young people can think together how they would like to be treated by their parents, in order to treat each other that way as "symbolic" parents. This program is extremely successful, not only in building the confidence and life-satisfaction of its members, but in actually diminishing all the symptoms of social stress among its members, including physical illness.

Healthy Interdependence

Hugs
Not
Drugs

Many professional social workers and teachers have been taught not to get too involved, in order not to foster dependency. Independence seems to be the highest goal of the helping professions. In our opinion, both the goal and the method are wrong. The goal for human beings should be interdependence. The method of reaching healthy interdependence includes full acceptance of the stage of dependence. In our Western culture we have not understood how to accept dependence. We put infants in separate cribs in separate rooms by themselves and let them cry themselves to sleep alone. We create a sense of isolation and loneliness on the deepest levels. We reinforce this in many ways as children grow up.

Creating mutual trust and interdependence among the young people is one of our major jobs. Being totally trustworthy and reliable ourselves, dependable in times of trouble, safe to depend on emotionally, is a primary requirement of the adults.

We care about each other!
Meet my wonderful family!!!

What Forms of Nurturance?

In actual practice, what form does nurturance take in a youth program?

In the first year of Youth Action Program's existence, fourteen young people moved in to live temporarily or part-time with staff. Some became permanent extended family members. At the outset, the young people were either homeless or in conflict with their families. As a result of this obvious need, we conceived of a program called "Second Chosen Families," to match young people with families who would welcome them into their homes as needed, with the agreement of the parents. This program was not developed, due to lack of resources. It would have been, like UNITAS, a very strong response to the call for family-like support when existing family supports are failing.

Usually, in most programs, nurturance is provided in a somewhat haphazard, and often inadequate way, in a range of forms. We recommend that programs think through this issue and develop a system for providing love and support.

At YAP, the forms of nurturance include counseling, friendship, dinners, recreational sharing, weekend retreats, listening, support groups, advising, helping directly with problems, finding assistance outside the program as needed, listening some more, taking an interest in somebody's very personal problems, meeting somebody's family, helping with illness or pregnancy or drug addiction or death in the family.

Most important, nurturance implies spending time with people in a responsive, non-directive, personal way. Adults must be free to put everything aside, and see what needs attention in the hearts and minds of the young people with whom they are involved.

Whenever an individual emerges and is able to sustain herself as a solid leader, it is almost always true that at least one adult has taken longterm personal responsibility as a mentor and friend and counselor for that person's development and well-being. It is, in fact, like being a "symbolic" parent. The phenomenon of being someone's protege works for young people in the youth program as well as it works for adults in the corporate world.

The challenge for each program is to make sure that everybody is somebody's beloved protege.

> "One time you told me that when you got discouraged you just thought about one person you knew YAP had truly helped, and that kept you going, and I thought, "WOW, if just one person makes it worthwhile, that's a lot of caring, to give so much of life to help one person. Then when you've experienced that kind of caring you have to pass it along to someone else, and that's what I'm trying to do now."
>
> - Sonia Texidor,
> at age 23, 1985

COMMUNICATING LOVE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people know you care about them when the following things happen:

1) You are always warm, friendly, and welcoming. A warm greeting and friendly smile and a lighting up of your face occurs predictably when your young friend appears.

2) You notice the special things your friend does, and you express your approval. You comment on the positive qualities and actions he displays.

3) You also notice a difficulty, and you offer a hand, and an ear. You're there when you're needed.

4) You go beyond what young people would expect. You make a personal connection - perhaps visiting his home, inviting him to your home, giving him your home phone number, appearing at the hospital if he or a family member is ill, visiting the school when problems occur there. Whatever way, you take a special personal interest in the young person that goes beyond any assigned or expected "professional" role.

5) You help the young person to pursue a special interest - a book, a career, entertainment, special aptitudes. You support the full realization of his potential, not settling for less.

6) You welcome emotional release when it occurs - if laughter, or tears, or genuine rage, should surface through a crisis or in close communication, it doesn't scare you. You embrace it as part of the young person, and hold him, or listen as long as the flow continues.

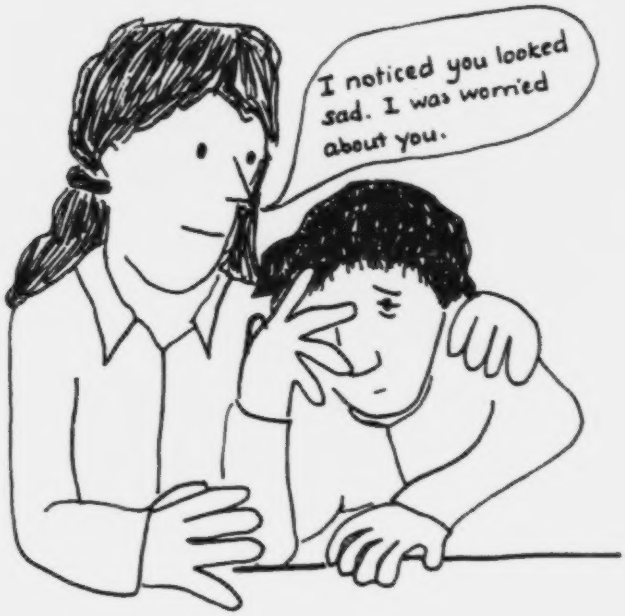
7) You always see past the hang-ups and the mistakes and the bad judgment to the heart of the struggling person. You never judge or reject or give up on the young person, even while you make clear your opinion of the bad behavior.

8) You always respect the ideas and the opinions of your friend, although you may not agree; sometimes you respect the limits that his emotions place on a situation, but you don't settle permanently for those limits.

9) You catch him up short on bad behavior, challenging him to aspire to the highest standards and to face the consequences of continued negativity or self-destructiveness. Sometimes this is the hardest of all - holding firmly to high expectations when the young person seems to be asking for permissiveness. Doing it firmly, from a base of love, accepting the possible upset from the young person but insisting on the rightness of your stand on his behalf, can make a difference.

If all of this is done, the young person will know that you truly care, and will begin to care about himself, and will trust you.

> "There's a lot of love in the Youth Action Program, and someday we're going to spread it around the world."
>
> - Victor Ortiz,
> at age 19, 1982


I noticed you looked sad. I was worried about you.

PERSONAL FRIENDSHIPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

When the adult invites a young person or several young people home to his house, or out for dinner, or away for the weekend on a trip, something qualitatively different happens. A friendship begins. The young people know, possibly for the first time, that the adult is not just doing a job.

Suddenly he opens up his own home, gives his own time, and demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that he cares.

A similar thing happens when the adult visits the young person in her home or on her block.

Not all staff members will do this. But those who do will have qualitatively different relationships with the young people.

Of course, when the relationship goes beyond the traditional professional one, the adult has to be careful, and has to maintain certain behavioral standards. There can be no confusion about alcohol, drugs, or sex. No alcohol, no drugs, and no sex should be permitted in the presence of or with the knowledge of the adult. The adult should not serve wine or beer at dinner. And so forth.

Similarly, there can be no gossip, no complaining about other adults who work in the program. It is all too easy as a friendship begins, to burden the young person with the adult's negative perceptions of things; or for the adult to condone and collude with the young person's own negative views. The adult has to maintain a fully responsible, fully positive attitude, even as the relationship becomes more personal, more open, more relaxed, and more of a real friendship. The fact that human beings often seem to use their shared negative feelings about a third party to get close to each other means that the adult has to be alert to avoid doing that.

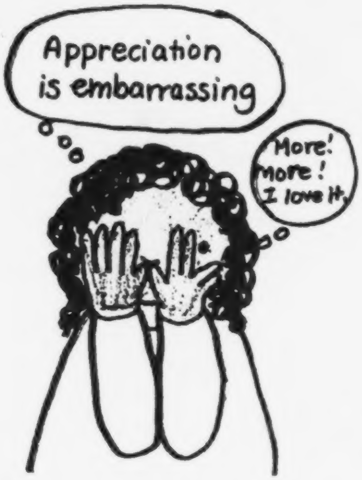
Instead, the personal friendship allows the adult to become a genuinely deep ally in the young person's striving to define and reach her dreams. Real conversation about the past, the future, the present; the dilemmas, the fears, the hopes, the traumas, the heartbreaks, the fantasies: this is what takes place in a friendship. It is the sort of counseling that makes the biggest difference - the surrogate parent, the mentor, the wiser friend who lends an ear and a hand, and who shows that he has confidence in you. He believes in you. He has time for you, and he'll stand up for you.

MUTUAL APPRECIATION

The simple act of appreciating each other makes a qualititative difference to the functioning of any group, and builds an important form of nuturance into on-going process.

Nobody ever gets enough appreciation. Nobody ever gets as much as he deserves. On the contrary, most people, especially young people, are insulted and put down in direct and indirect ways all the time. Therefore it is important to do the opposite, to appreciate people freely and frequently.

It is a simple matter to structure appreciation into meetings and gatherings. At the end of virtually every meeting, we take the time for every person to be appreciated. This always brings smiles, chuckles, relaxation. Suddenly any mounting boredom or impatience subsides. We have seen a group of 30 young people stay an extra hour at the end of a long meeting just to hear the appreciations that people give each other.



Simplest Format

The simplest format is to have each person say what he likes or respects about the person sitting on his right or left. For slight variations you can have everyone appreciate the person two to one side, or three to one side. Sometimes, if you are aware of a tense relationship in the group that would preclude a sincere appreciation, you have to choose a format which will skip over the existing conflict. You don't want to accidentally spotlight a problem when you are using a process to bring people closer.

Variations

Another variation is to invite two or three spontaneous appreciations for each person from whoever wants to offer them. This has the advantage of people's giving their most heartfelt appreciations. It has the disadvantage of making people nervous when not as many people leap to appreciate them as might leap for others. Silences are deafening in this format. It takes a little more skill as group leader, because you may have to intervene in some way, smoothing over the nervousness or making the potentially embarrassing feelings explicit in order to relax people. But it's more spontaneous, and some groups respond better to the spontaneity than to the structured go-round with everyone assigned to appreciate someone according only to seating arrangement. These latter are, however, safer for most groups, even though you sometimes have to settle for the very minimal, "Well, I don't know him too well, but he seems like an all right guy."

Lots of adults are uneasy "imposing" a "forced" structure of appreciation on a group of young people. But when it's explained correctly, the young people embrace it delightedly, even the most apparently cynical ones.

Simple Explanations

Explanations can be more or less elaborate, as appropriate. But it's always good to explain the underlying hypotheses so the young people can understand what's going on and why.

Following are various levels of explanation, just as examples:

"I believe that nobody in the world gets as much respect and appreciation as

I made it to the top!
I can't see
ow!
Don't step on me

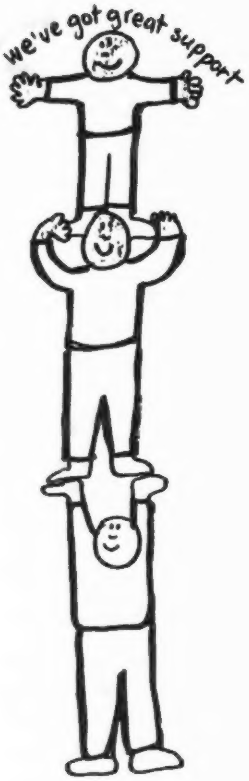
"PUTTING EACH OTHER DOWN"

he deserves. Just about everybody is always trying his hardest, and hardly anybody ever really notices. In fact, people get put down all the time, especially young people, and it hurts. So in this program we don't put anybody down; we put people up."

"Part of being a leader is learning how to help build unity in groups. People feel better in groups when they know they are appreciated, and then they speak more freely and participate more fully. Appreciations help people to feel comfortable and accepted in the group."

"Part of the discipline of being a leader is to see the best in everybody. If you can't see something to appreciate in a person, it just means you haven't seen him fully. You've been distracted by the things you don't like. But if you really look at him deeply, you will see something about his struggle, the obstacles he is trying to overcome, the positive things that bring him here, and you'll be able to appreciate him."

"I believe every human being is born good, and every human being is doing her very best at every moment to become the best person she can. It's not always easy and it's not always obvious to the observer, because so many things have happened to hurt people; they don't always act good. But inside of everybody is a good person, waiting to be seen and understood. When you dislike somebody you're really just disliking the effects of all her past mistreatment. It always helps to look past the annoying things about a person, to look for her heart of gold, and when you see it, say so."



"PUTTING EACH OTHER UP"

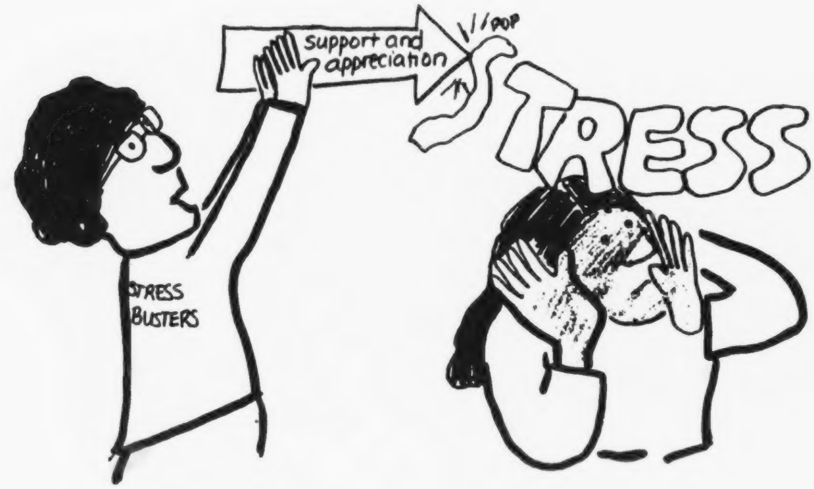
This last rap is controversial. Most people believe there are good people and bad people, and when you don't like someone you're justified. Whom you like and whom you don't like is normal conversation for almost everybody. But still, it is important to put out this controversial position. It will ring true to many people who may have been waiting, unbeknownst to themselves, to hear somebody say it. Whether people believe it's true or not, it can be very reassuring to hear the leader say it, because it means you can expect the leader to look for the best in you, even if nobody else does, and even if you've lost sight of it yourself.

Support the Leaders

It is also very important to build an expectation that anybody who takes on extra responsibility, who puts himself out front in any way, will be appreciated by the group. Routinely the chairperson, the spokesperson, the person who gets the refreshments, should all be appreciated, and it should be made explicit how they helped the group. This becomes a ritual, a tradition that the group will carry on with just a little encouragement.

It is very common in our society for the leader of anything to get attacked. We try to reverse that. The person who takes responsibility should be supported and appreciated, never attacked or taken for granted or rudely criticized.

You can't develop leadership in an atmosphere where leadership is not appreciated!



SELF-ESTIMATION

There are times when we need to appraise our work with an eye toward improvements. We need to acknowledge and learn from our mistakes. And we need to commit ouselves to change what interferes with our work or our relationships. This appraisal has usually taken the form of criticism. At its worst, a person is raked over the coals by the group. At its best, there is "principled criticism" when a person is confronted with his troublesome behavior out of love, and offered a hand with it.

"Self-estimation" goes to the heart of the need for change without rupturing relationships. The person whose work is to be evaluated tells the others what he thinks he did well, and what needs to be improved or changed next time. Each of the others then offers the same information from his perspective, being sure to begin with the positive. Almost always, what we were dreading having to say to our fellow worker in a critical way is put forth by the person himself as something he was aware of, and usually feels badly about. Then it is much easier for him to accept suggestions from others about it, and for others to offer help where needed. This process usually avoids the person's feeling defensive or hurt. It is good to do self-estimation with every member of a working group

In the ideal process, self-estimation is followed by members of the group listening to the person describe the feelings which made him act less effectively. Emotional release of the feelings right then is a key aid to changing the behavior in the future.

But even without an emotional release, the process of giving supportive and accurate feedback is a form of appreciation that acknowledges the importance of a person's development and the commitment of the group to that person.

> "YAP is an exciting place, with exciting people doing exciting things that get everybody excited. There's a lot of love there, that is generated from the center and touches everybody, making a big exciting family."
>
> \- Freddy Acosta, at age 25, 1988
> Reflecting on his 10 years at YAP

SYSTEMS OF MUTUAL SUPPORT

by John Bell

Why Suppport?

True leadership includes caring about each other as we work to improve the world. Caring about each other includes paying attention to how we feel, and what is going on in our personal lives. Any ongoing group will quickly come up against three major sources of stress that interfere with the work. Following is a sample presentation, describing these to staff and youth.

Sources of Stress

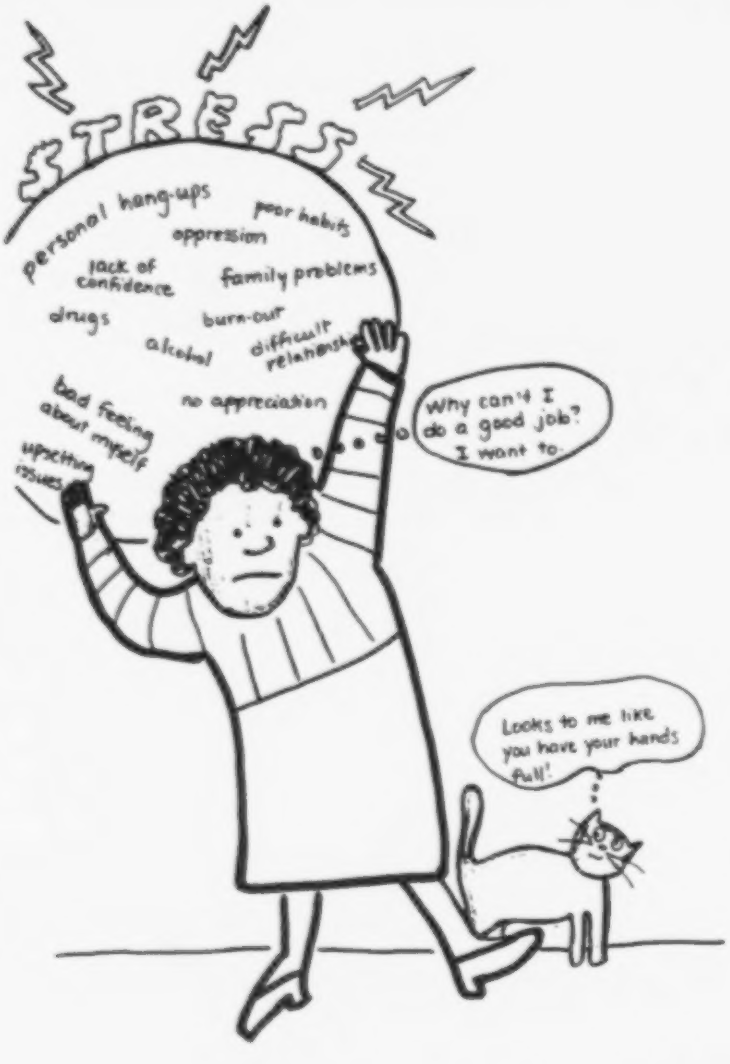
- "The nature of the work or issue itself can be upsetting. Dealing with the effects of poverty, trying to overcome homelessness, struggling with violence and drug addiction, working long hours with little appreciation, can load us up with distressing feelings. Unless we take time to unload them as they accumulate, the feelings tend to pile up and make us feel discouraged, or burnt-out, or angry, or hopeless. This is true of adults and young people alike.

- "Personal difficulties. In addition, each of us brings to the group a baggage-car full of personal hang-ups, bad feelings about ourselves, poor habits or attitudes. Most of these are simply the results of hurtful experiences we had in the past. We never asked for these hurts, but each of us got huge loads dumped on us. As a result, we might have bad feelings about ourselves, or lack confidence, or expect people to criticize us, or hog the attention too much, or get irrational in meetings, or always come late, or not follow through with what we said we would do, or feel like we can't think about "strategy" or "policies," or feel competitive, or want help all the time, etc., etc. These personal difficulties often undermine the group and our effectiveness in work. This is true of adults and young people alike.

- "Oppression. Furthermore, we must do our work in a society which keeps different groups separate and misunderstanding each other: Black and White, female and male, younger and older, Jew and non-Jew, working class and middle class, gay and straight. Many of us have deep scars of hurt and mistrust. Even people who have become quite aware of racism or sexism or adultism make mistakes in relating to each other. These issues show up in every group sooner or later.

"To function at its best, a group needs a process of discussing, de-fusing, and understanding issues rising from differences of class, race, sex, culture, and age.

"Thinking of these three sources of stress should make it clear why it is crucial to build emotional support into the heart of our work. Assisting each other to heal the pain we have suffered in our lives helps us care more deeply about each other, think more clearly, act more confidently, and become more effective in our leadership.


STRESS
personal hang-ups
poor habits
oppression
lack of confidence
family problems
drugs
burn-out
alcohol
difficult relationshi
no appreciation
bad feeling about myself
upsetting issues
Why can't I do a good job? I want to.
Looks to me like you have your hands full!

"Each one of us is precious. Each one of us has experienced great sorrow. Each one of us has had dreams smashed. Each one of us has had a truckload of disappointments, rejections, and mistreatments dumped on us. In our work together, we want to take the time to heal these hurts. Why? Because we deserve to be cared for. Because freeing ourselves from past hurts will make us stronger, more effective leaders. Because the world will change as we change ourselves."

Following are some suggestions and models for developing support.

Personal Support Groups

There is much personal support that happens informally in most groups. However, having a formal "support group" is very helpful. The basic idea is for people to gather together as a regular group simply to listen to how it has been for each other on a feeling level. Small groups of five to eight are best, since this size allows more time for each individual. If your group is larger than eight, divide it into smaller groups. Protect the time by taking the phones off the hook, by allotting enough time (one hour minimum), and by meeting in as pleasant a place as possible.

Begin with each person in turn sharing something that is going well for him, either personally or in his work. The purpose of this is to remind ourselves of the positive aspects of our lives, despite how we may be feeling at any one moment. Beginning this way usually raises the tone of the group, provides chances to celebrate each other's good news, and draws our attention away from what might be upsetting us.

Then divide the remaining time equally among those present, each taking a turn to be listened to by the others who pay attention actively, looking at the speaker with warmth, caring, and no judgment. This is the heart of the process: learning how to listen to one another in such a way that people feel encouraged to share what is troubling them. Each of us is eager for someone to really listen and be interested. It seems that in day-to-day life, each of us is continually checking out the people we are with in a computer-like calculation, assessing how safe it is to share what is going on with us. When people are listened to with respect, warmth, and lack of judgment, they spontaneously begin to bring up what is bothering them at the moment.

Releasing Feelings

As trust develops in the group, individual members will deepen their emotional sharing with a natural releasing of feelings: tears, fears, laughter, anger. This is healing. We humans have a built-in drive to heal ourselves of hurts. This can be seen most clearly in young children. What do they do when they get hurt? Cry. This is natural. They try to get someone's attention to the hurt. No one has to teach them to cry. They have to be taught to stop crying. And that is exactly what happened to most of us in growing up. Our natural healing process got tampered with by older people around us who told us in one way or another not to cry, or laugh too loudly, or be scared, or get mad. The result: each of us is carrying unhealed hurts from the past which infect our daily lives.

Given enough safety, encouragement, and time, we are eager to tell someone how it really is, and was, for us. If someone listens to us attentively and warmly, over time we will cry about the losses, disappointments, and endings in our lives; feel scared about things we couldn't admit before; laugh at the embarrassments; and feel the flashing rise of anger and rage about injustice we have witnessed.

Whenever we listen to a person's life story, we are usually inspired by the heroism in his life, and how well he has survived, given everything that has come down on him. He, like all of us, functions as well as he can, despite emotional distress. Intuitively, we know that we would be better off if we lightened that load of distress.

The short-term effect of releasing feelings in these ways is that we clear our heads somewhat and function better. Having a good cry about a problem will not make the problem go away. But a good cry usually enhances our ability to deal with the problem. The long-range effect is that we begin to recover from the difficult experiences that made us feel insecure or unloved, or made us act timidly or over-aggressively, or got in the way of intimate relationships, or made us think we were stupid, selfish, and incompetent, or any of a host of other ways our human functioning was interfered with by the hurtful experiences that came our way.

Never Push for Emotional Release

While the expression of feelings is likely to occur spontaneously if the group is sufficiently attentive and caring, the facilitator should never urge or push for emotional release. This will be felt as "manipulative." Since feelings are scary, any urgency or eagerness about the importance of expressing them is unnerving. The adult just needs to be comfortable with them if they do come up.

If tears should start to flow, a simple comment like, "It's O.K. to cry, go right ahead. It's good to get it out," will help, along with, oftentimes, a hug.

On the other hand, angry feelings that are being dumped on another person in an insulting or hurtful way should be interrupted, or the security of the group will be lost.

The support group will have an important positive effect if open and honest talking is taking place. The deeper healing of emotional release may or may not take place, depending on the circumstances. The adult needs to be sensitive to people's fears.

Concepts and Guidelines for Emotional Support:

The following concepts and guidelines help emotional support to flourish:

- Feelings are just feelings. They are not reality. They don't need to be acted upon. The more intense the feeling, the less likely it is to be a useful guide to action. Intense feelings often cloud our thinking. We can just let the feelings be shared and released, so they don't continue to distort the way we see reality. Simply accept the feelings, occasionally reminding people that they do not need to act on the feelings, just dump them out, and later they'll be able to figure things out better.

- Avoid giving advice or even telling similar experiences. People need our attention so they can release the distress feelings that interfere with their OWN thinking.

- Maintain strict confidentiality. That is, do not tell anyone outside the group what the person shared, and do not bring it up again to the person himself, unless he initiates the discussion.

- Remember to distinguish people from their feelings. People can temporarily have very bad feelings. They need others to know that these are not permanent and not "who they are." It is most helpful to view the people always as wholesome, creative, essentially loving, very smart, and capable. And whenever they are not like this, some stress, old or new, has made them act differently.

- It is never useful to dump angry feelings on someone else in an insulting way in the name of "honesty."

- Sharing meetings work best when there is one person in charge, to set the tone, to see that the time limits are kept, to remind people how to listen, if necessary, and to think about how the whole group is functioning.

- It is good to close the sharing with some form of affection-sharing or appreciations of each other.

- Suppport groups such as these work best on week-end retreats, when a general context of safety and trust has been built, and people are away from their day-to-day frustrations. With persistence, however, support groups can become a valuable component of the ongoing life of the program.

Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10029
Phone: 212-860-8170

73

Element Three

BUILDING LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS AND SKILLS

* Identifying Potential Leaders
* A Process for Defining Leadership
* Decision-Making Processes and Powers
* Chairing Meetings
* Building Reading & Writing Into the Work
* Speaking Truth To Power
* The Weekend Retreat

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL LEADERS

The first step in leadership development is noticing the potentially outstanding leaders.

These are not always the most outspoken, most popular, most assertive people with the most developed viewpoint. In fact, sometimes the most aggressive "leaders" turn out to have some very negative characteristics associated with their dominance. We have many times reached for attractive and confident young people as leaders who turned out to steal, lie, drink compulsively, dominate and hurt the people who didn't agree with them, or have other bad habits which eventually discredited them or divided the organization.

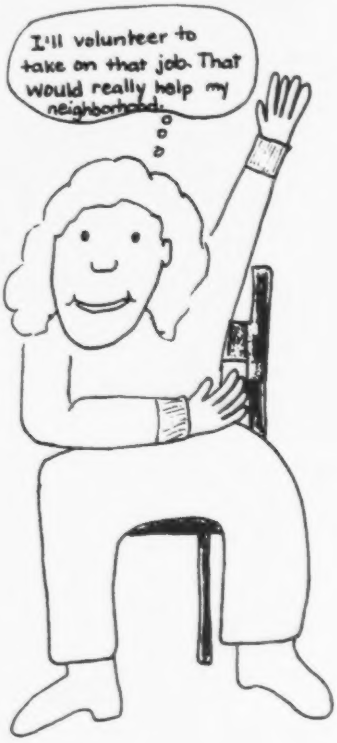
Some outstanding potential leaders are very quiet at the outset. The question is, who spontaneously takes responsibility which improves the situation for other people? Watch for people who:

- Have thoughtful ideas about how to improve things;
- Play a mediating role;
- Never ridicule someone else;
- Offer themselves to take unglamorous responsibilities;
- Reach out to someone who is unhappy;
- Do much more work than would ever be expected to make something succeed;
- Rise to an occasion, overcoming obvious fear to do something they think is right;
- Volunteer to help with whatever is going on;
- Are reliable, doing what they say they'll do.

Of course, if these characteristics are coupled with confidence, outgoing warmth, and an ability to verbalize one's ideas, so much the better.

A Precious Gesture

A very precious gesture is the act of raising one's hand to volunteer. At any group meeting, if an opportunity to participate in some leadership activity is presented, the hands that go up in response should be noted down most seriously and follow-up done. If a young person raises his hand, wordlessly indicating, "I want to give my time participating in that activity, because it will improve the program, the community, the world, or will teach me something about how the world works," then you can assume that behind that raised hand lies a deep yearning for real leadership responsibility. It is the solemn resonsibility of the adults to grasp the hand that is raised, and to hold out in return all the information and opportunity and guidance we have to offer.


I'll volunteer to take on that job. That would really help my neighborhood.

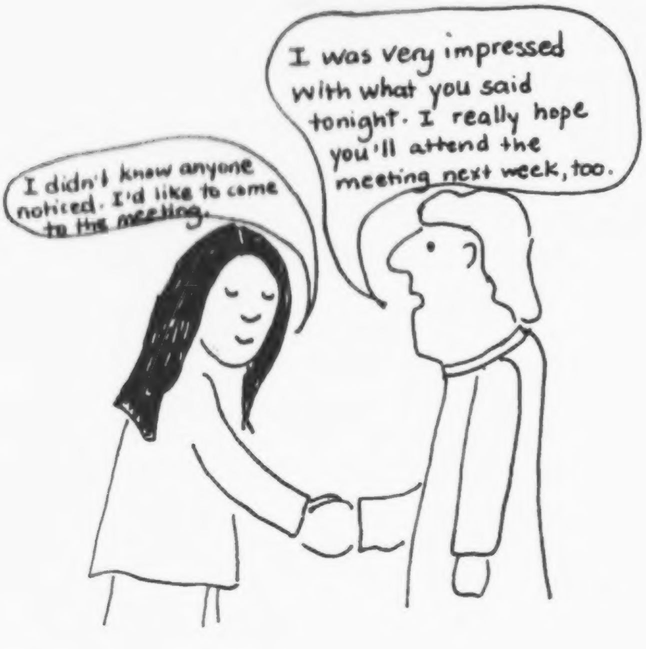
If a young person raises his hand, wordlessly indicating, "I want to give my time participating in that activity, because it will improve the program, the community, the world, or will teach me something about how the world works," then you can assume that behind that raised hand lies a deep yearning for real leadership responsibility.

Initial Encouragement of Leaders

Leadership is something we assume to be a natural expression of a universal human impulse: to take responsibility, coordinating the energy and intelligence of other human beings, to achieve goals that enhance human existence. It is something everyone wants to do, and everyone can eventually do, to varying degrees, in areas of their own interest and skill.

In approaching the question of encouraging leaders, we are really talking about how to encourage leadership qualities and skills in everybody, as the opportunity arises.

The adult needs to watch every situation for the expression of leadership qualities and skills, and then comment on them. Comment to the group, and comment to the individuals after the meeting. Drawing the attention of the group systematically to those attitudes and behaviors which improve the group's functioning, which improve the quality of thinking of the group, is an on-going form of training which will make young people aware of the impact of their behavior, and will also serve to encourage the hesitant person.


I was very impressed with what you said tonight. I really hope you'll attend the meeting next week, too.
I didn't know anyone noticed. I'd like to come to the meeting.

After a meeting, it can make a big difference to speak personally to an individual, saying something like, "I was very impressed with your participation in this group. Everything you said was very thoughtful, and very smart, and you obviously care about what happens here. I hope you will get more involved, because you have real leadership abilities. Have you thought of running for election to the policy committee?" Or something like, "The way you made it possible for the younger members to speak up, by listening to them and asking questions, was a real important thing. It made the committee work much better and was a real act of leadership. Thanks." Being noticed in this way makes a deep impression. Adults rarely do this. They seem to forget how important a word of praise can be.

As important as the adult's comments, is setting up the situation so that the members of the group appreciate each other for their leadership. A simple go-round, in which each member is appreciated by two other members for leadership skills, attitudes, or behavior which he showed in the current event, refines the group's ideas about leadership and focuses attention on people's positive behavior. It provides peer support for leadership development.

A PROCESS FOR DEFINING LEADERSHIP

New leadership groups and on-going leadership groups both need to take the time to define and re-define good leadership. People hear and remember what they are ready for at the time, so each successive discussion raises and deepens the level of identification with the concept.

This can be done as a workshop with a large number of young people, dividing into small groups, or with an on-going stable group.

In a small group of six to twelve people, have the facilitator ask the following questions:

- What are the QUALITIES of a good leader - that is, what kind of a person is a good leader?

- What are the FUNCTIONS of a leader - that is, what does a good leader DO?

- What are the benefits of playing a leadership role in a group?

- What are the stresses connected to being a leader?

- What kind of support do people taking leadership need from others?

- Who in history or in your life has been a good leader, in your opinion?

Of course, minutes should be taken and a report made back to the large group if the work is being done in a workshop. If it is an ongoing leadership group minutes are important to remind people at the following meeting of the content of the discussion. It is also useful to distribute the minutes to the members of the program so they can reflect on the same issues and know what their leadership group thinks about leadership.

Adult members of the group need not withhold their own key contributions. This is a good context in which to raise ideas which might not yet be raised by the group. But the adult should select carefully what to contribute, so as not to dominate, and not to offer what the young people would have offered themselves. Listen for a missing piece which might raise the level of discussion and offer that piece.

Essential Steps for On-going Groups

If the group is an on-going leadership group, there are two more steps to this process which are essential, and which will lead to a wonderful, cohesive feeling.

Ask each person to take ten or fifteen minutes to write down his own strong points and areas that need improvement to become a truly fine leader, using the qualities and functions of a leader as a guide.

After this, have each member in turn present his self-evaluation and receive feedback from every other member of the group. This process takes some time. In a group of 10, each person's turn takes 20 to 25 minutes.

Good Effects

This process has several good effects. It focuses each member on his own development, and gives him full feedback from the group regarding where he stands. Insecurities in groups are often based on uncertainty about what other people think of us; it's usually a relief to find out. Most of the feedback will be positive, and the facilitator should make sure of that. Sometimes it is important to insist that each person begin with the positive feedback and then make suggestions for improvements or next steps. It is always important to insure that each person giving feedback makes positive observations, not just criticisms.

It is a relief to the group to be able to speak to each other about their experiences together. Enormous positive energy gets expressed in an unusually safe and serious group context. People get to say how much they like and admire each other. At the same time, people get to hear and say the criticisms which had been left unsaid and were simmering underneath, but which are remarkably mild in this context.

In an ordinary group, this process will always enhance the level of closeness and honesty as well as the consciousness of good leadership qualities and positive leadership behavior. It is worth doing at least once a year with any on-going leadership group. A good place to do it is in a leadership retreat, where there is enough time, and a mood of getting closer.

The Only Risk

The only risk in this process, and it is extremely rare, is when some vicious hostilities are lurking under the surface and use this opportunity to attack. In such a case, the adult guide will have to use all his skill to provide protection to the person or people being attcked. He'll need to give theory about understanding each person's struggle and about not attacking each other. If possible, the adult may use the opportunity to resolve the underlying problem.

Useful in Other Contexts

This process of mutual evaluation can also be used in other contexts with good effect. For example, in any weekend retreat, it is a good idea to close the retreat with a group process in which each person says what she did that made a positive contribution to the group and how she could have made an even better contribution. Then all members of the group offer their appreciations and their suggestions for improvement. This gives a good sense of closure and closeness to the group. Even those people, perhaps especially those people, who feel they have played a negative role get balanced feedback from the group that tends to relax them - at least they know exactly where they stand and don't have to be anxious about whether everyone hates them now. They discover that people don't hate them, but they do have specific suggestions for improvement which are attainable.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND POWERS

The essence of leadership development is engaging young people in making decisions. The decisions ought not to be peripheral. They must be of great importance. Only real responsibility will summon up the full commitment of the young people. Only the power to make significant decisions will truly counteract the past disrespect that has excluded young people from virtually all significant decision-making.

Hiring of staff, review of budget, evaluation of staff, setting program priorities, making program policy, future planning, firing of staff, determining objectives and strategy for political action: all of these are grist for the mill. All of these are within the ability of the young people.

At Youth Action Program all of these are under the jurisdiction of the Policy Committee, which functions as the governing board even though an adult community Board of Directors maintains legal jurisdiction and has the right to over-rule the Policy Committee. (In ten years the legal Board of Directors has only twice over-ruled the Policy Committee.) The Policy Committee includes youth representatives from each of YAP's 12 projects, one staff representative, and the Director.

"YAP is a learning experience. Everybody should experience it. You have to be there to believe it. It's a place where young people talk and their ideas are implemented and they become tangible. YAP does that as a constant thing. Nobody else does that. Everybody else calls us the "kids" and doesn't listen. I hope YAP never dies. It really turns young people around. I wish other programs could learn from YAP".

Sonia Texidor
YAP graduate

82

Role of Adult Guide

The adult, or more experienced youth leader, has a critical role to play in guiding the decision-making committee. He must set the tone; insure that basic values and guidelines are followed; think about the input from, development of, and relationships among all members; insure that the committee moves forward on all fronts; provide on-going training; ensure that adequate information is available for informed decision-making; prepare the chairperson for each meeting; and return things to an even keel when emotionalism begins to roll the committee from side to side.

Needless to say, the adult administrator relating to the Committee must be well respected and trusted and must, in return, trust and respect the ideas of the committee members, listening carefully to all. It is, in most ways, the same process as working with any Board of Directors.

Consensus Decision-Making

Decisions are made by consensus, after thorough discussion, in which everyone is given a chance to speak to the issues and everyone is thoroughly heard. As a general practice, we do not use parliamentary procedure, or majority rule, or any other technique which allows one group to dominate the other. Instead, we use approaches which reach for the piece of truth in everyone's point of view, which foster the attitude that everyone's opinion is important, and which develop our skills at fashioning solutions which meet everybody's needs as much as possible.

If we cannot get real agreement on a decision, we ask the minority if they will agree to implement the majority point of view and re-evaluate after a certain period of time. This is usually acceptable, as long as everyone has been thoroughly heard in the discussion. Occasionally we are forced to decide something by voting, in order to move forward.

A key role of the chairperson is to make sure everyone is thoroughly heard, and all points of view respected. In this milieu all are free to do their best thinking about the issue.

Full Information Needed

A key role of the adult guide for this committee is to provide full information about every issue, and to teach the group to demand full information. For example, left to themselves, young people usually do not insist on checking the references of candidates for jobs. Many of them think that past mistakes should not be held against someone, and that a person will do better next time. They would often be willing to make a decision based only on an interview. The adult has to educate the committee regarding the critical importance of references, how to go about getting them, and to insist on references from a person's past three supervisors before making a decision. But once adequate information is in front of them, the young people can make the final decision.

Hiring of Staff

Nothing liberates young people from a powerless position faster than participating in the hiring of adult staff. It is a dramatic reversal of past roles.

It is, of course, logical that a program will hire better staff if young people have a role in selecting them. When a person can make good contact with young people in an interview, the chances are good that she can continue to make warm contact once hired. If she cannot get the approval of a group of young people, it is just as well that the program search further.

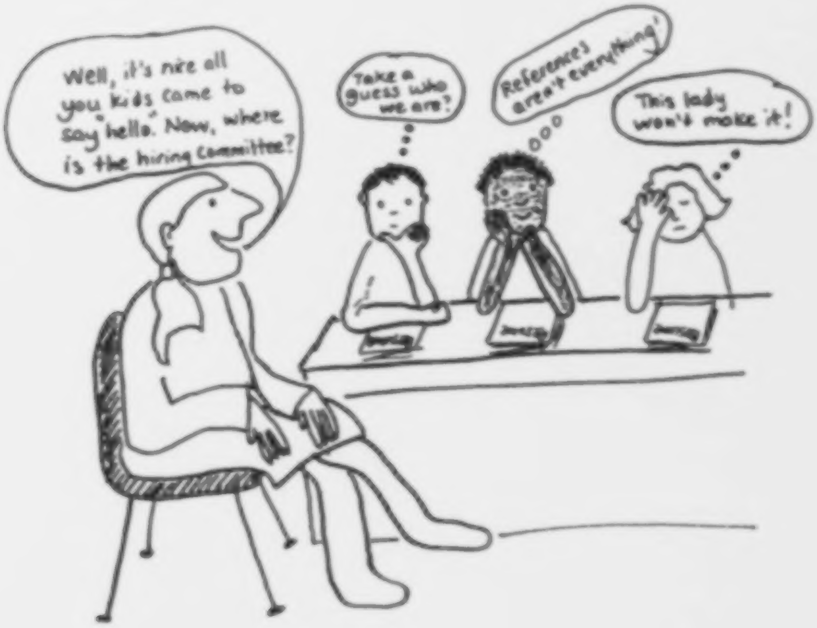
It seems to be a workable and appropriate balance of power to require that the youth governing committee and the Director agree on a candidate.

The most exciting process is for the committee to interview a series of candidates, from whom they will select the best. Each of them should have been pre-screened and found acceptable by the Director. The committee should review the references, to underscore their importance.

Prior to interviewing, the young people should draw up a list of the qualities they seek in a staff member, and a list of questions which will help them assess whether the candidate has those qualities. Each member of the interviewing committee should be assigned several questions to ask, after the group has developed its list of questions. This way silences will be avoided. But members should also be encouraged to ask questions which occur to them spontaneously during the interview.

Role-plays are effective for getting another glimpse of the candidate's abilities. They also allow young people to shine as actors. The role-play situation should be set in advance by the group, and a person assigned to carry it out. It does not, in our experience, need to be rehearsed.

A group of young people selecting adults to work in the program are instantly empowered. They take this responsibility with the utmost seriousness. Nothing is more important, really, than choosing which adults will work with them.


Well, it's nice all you kids came to say "hello." Now, where is the hiring committee?
Take a guess who we are?
References aren't everything!
This lady won't make it!

Firing of Staff

The most difficult area has been firing. At Youth Action Program young people have had the final word on firing. We do not recommend this to other programs, and it has recently been changed at YAP. After ten years during which successive Policy Committees had the power to fire, one Policy Committee finally relinquished that power because they did not want to be a target of adult manipulation. They asked the Director to consult with them, but make the final decision herself.

Prior to that, every firing took too long, jeopardizing program commitments. Each was potentially divisive, as adults who felt their jobs in jeopardy would try to persuade young people that they were being wronged by the administration. Of course, having this power, and being embroiled in the most complex and emotional decisions, created intense learning experiences and deep involvement for the youth leaders. It also forced them to set standards of performance independent of their personal relationships. The learning was enormous. Helping people to set standards and hold to them is an important part of any community organizer's role. For this reason, the Director lived with the inconvenience and strain of not having final firing authority. However, we expect the same benefits will be attainable through a consultation process.

Including Young People in "Adult" Meetings

Some organizations try to get youth involvement through token representation of young people on boards or advisory committees. In our experience, this does not work well. For one or two young people to hold their own in a group of adults is extremely difficult. Usually the adults' greater experience, knowledge, and confidence will crowd them out. The young people don't feel comfortable asking for explanations of what is unfamiliar; and they don't usually force their opinions into the group. Usually they will drop out.

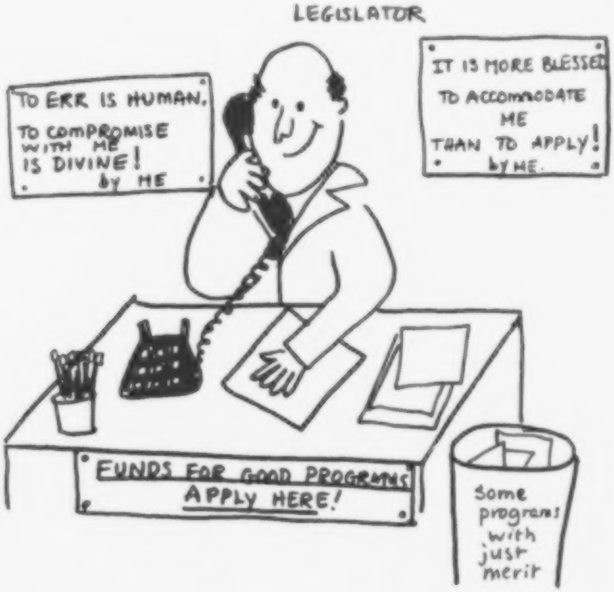
It works better when there is at least a 4:1 ratio of young people to adults, with just a few adults adding their perspective to the deliberations of the young people, or helping to facilitate their discussion.

Are There Issues Too Sensitive for Young People?

There are some issues which adults would normally consider too "sensitive" to discuss with young people. Our advice would be to reconsider. This conclusion is probably just another form of adultism. We have never found an issue that young people couldn't participate in to the benefit of the organization.

An interesting example occurred when we received word from a government official that our proposal for public funds was the best one, but they couldn't fund it due to opposition from one of our legislators. They advised us to make some accommodation with our legislator, to put him or one of his colleagues on our Board, to obtain his support.

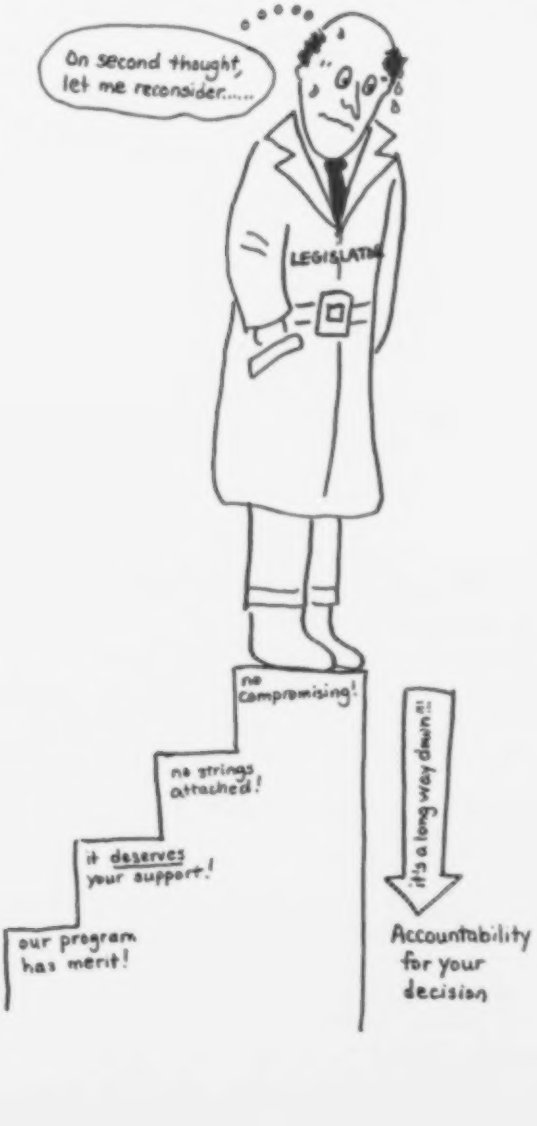
We called a meeting of the core group of young people. They were adamant. "No way!" would they give this politician influence over our program if he wouldn't support the proposal on its merits. They would not compromise this principle. His job was to get funds for good programs, not to control them. If he wouldn't support us on the merits we would find a way to hold him accountable to the community, not back off just because he seemed to have the power. In the meeting one adult said, "You must realize that this is just normal. It's just the way the game is played. If we want funding we have to get along with our legislator." At that moment, one young man leapt to his feet, and with tears streaming down his face, said, "YOU people taught me to stand up for what I believe in! YOU people taught me to have principles and to fight for what is right! If you sell out, I'll never believe in anything again! I'd rather lose all our funding than be bullied like this. He has to answer to the community!"


LEGISLATOR
TO ERR IS HUMAN. TO COMPROMISE WITH ME IS DIVINE! by ME
IT IS MORE BLESSED TO ACCOMMODATE ME THAN TO APPLY! by ME.
FUNDS FOR GOOD PROGRAMS APPLY HERE!
Some programs with just merit

Forty of us sat together for six hours and hammered out our policy and our plan for handling this legislator. We were five adults and thirty-five teen-agers with no prior experience working out political strategies. When we finished, we were all very satisfied.

We carried out a well-orchestrated series of steps to persuade the politician to support us on the merits. We succeeded in the end, and got the funding without compromising. Nothing was more exciting and more real in our history than the moment this complex and principled path was laid out, adults and young people working together in unfamiliar terrain.

The most educational thing for young people is to participate in real decisions about central issues. The best way to keep the adults honest and true to their fundamental principles is to continually hold their plans up to a bright light so the young people can scrutinize them.


On second thought, let me reconsider.....
LEGISLATOR
no compromising!
no strings attached!
it deserves your support!
our program has merit!
it's a long way down!!
Accountability for your decision

Example of a Crisis Handled by Youth Leaders

Every so often - about four times in our first decade - a struggle between YAP and an adult staff member takes place. The administration decides that a staff person has to be let go, and the staff person tries to organize the young people in her defense. The young people are thus put in the position of having to choose sides. This is a wrenching and difficult experience. It is made all the more complicated by the fact that the young people on the Policy Committee have a voice in any decision to fire a staff member and therefore must make a decision.

This type of situation is by far the most difficult faced by the administration and the young people in a youth-run program. So as not to make youth involvement sound too rosy, one of these messy situations is described below.

One project organizer was doing a wonderful job. He had taken a project from zero to a nice level of enthusiasm and involvement. He had a special ability to get close to the young people and create activities they liked.

One weekend he and five young people took off for a weekend trip and didn't return on time. As parents looked for them, it became evident that they had not gone to the place they were scheduled to go. Furthermore, they had pretended to the other young people in the program that the weekend trip was cancelled, thus deliberately excluding the others.

When the group returned, they systematically lied about the whole episode. The Director spent a week investigating the stories told, meeting with parents, and unearthing the truth.

When the situation was presented to the Policy Committee, they decided the organizer should be fired. The rest of the staff agreed. However, this was not an easy decision, because the organizer had indeed done a fine job to this point and was well loved.

The Chairman of the Policy Committee and the Director went together to the project to inform the young people that their organizer had to leave. The younger children were terribly upset, crying and pleading to keep him. The organizer announced that he would not leave, that the young people and the community wanted him, so he would take the project and secede from the Youth Action Program.

As the Director and Policy Committee Chairman, who was 16 years old, left the project, eggs were thrown at them from a neighboring roof by young people in the project. Feelings were running very high.

As the Project Organizer mobilized the young people to secede, two of the long-term members of the project who had been part of YAP for several years, took charge. They said, "Wait a minute. We didn't decide to secede. We are calling a meeting of the members, without any of the adults present, and without the young people who went on the trip. We will think through the issues and make our own decision."

They set up a meeting with a carefully crafted agenda, as they had learned to do through years of participation. At the meeting they reviewed the incident that had led to the organizer's firing, and they discussed the pros and cons of secession. After thorough discussion, they decided not to separate from YAP. They drew up a list of concerns to discuss with the Director.

A delegation of four young people with a written list of requests met with the Director the next day. All of their requests were reasonable. They wanted to participate in the selection of the next project organizer, select the member of the administration who would supervise their project, have permission to keep their pets at the project, and various other things. Two of them apologized for the egg-throwing.

The full healing of this incident took a while, but the impresssive fact that two of the older teenagers had prevailed with thoughtful leadership in a moment when adults they loved were pitted against each other and most of the youth members were highly emotional was a testimony to the depth of learning which had gone on during the previous years. They handled themselves as excellent leaders.

CHAIRING MEETINGS

Young people can learn to chair meetings in stages, with the back-up of the adult.

Full Preparation

A thorough way of teaching is to meet with the assigned chairperson before the meeting and develop an agenda together, going over the timing, the possible issues that may come up, the content of all the items, and the elements of process the chairperson should be aware of.

When this is done, if the young person is reasonably confident, the adult can largely step out of the picture, and the young person can be the full chairperson.

A Short Cut

When the rush of work prevents this kind of careful preparation, there is another way that is still worth doing. All the members of the committee learn a basic agenda outline, as follows:

1) Touch base
2) Read minutes
3) Correct and approve minutes
4) Review tasks assigned
5) Review proposed agenda
6) Old business
7) New business
8) Review new tasks assigned
9) Evaluate
10) Appreciate.

Given this structure, a chairperson can handle the movement from item to item, and let the adult guide feed in the issues under new business as needed. This way a young person can still be in charge of the meeting, getting experience, without having to know the ins and outs of every issue.

Sometimes it works for the guide to sit next to the practicing chairperson as a partner, and whisper suggestions to him as needed. The group is very tolerant of this, because everyone wants to see a young person learn, and appreciates the adult's commitment to that.

Given enough practice, young people become very able chairpeople, and this is a skill that is very highly valued by themselves and by the world at large.

Rotation of the Chair

We have sometimes rotated the chair, to give a lot of people practice. At other times, we have let one elected chairperson lead for several months in a row, until he is very skilled. At that time his role changes. He steps into the role of thinking about the committee as a whole - the issues it should deal with, the progress on all fronts, the membership, its relationship to the program, etc. - and stops chairing the individual meetings. In other words, he steps into the role of being the assistant to the adult guide, picking up some of the functions previously handled by the adult. This, clearly, is a higher level of skill and awareness than chairing.

To chair well, the principles of running good meetings, described below, must be internalized and followed.

How To Run Good Meetings

If you're responsible for any on-going work group or committee numbering between five and twenty people, and you want to be sure the group hangs together and moves forward, follow these suggestions. If you do them all, and your personal style is in tune with the group, you'll find the work goes well and the spirit of the group stays positive.

- Make sure everyone is notified of the meeting as personally as is practical or necessary to get them there. Make sure you know who is expected and who is not coming.

- Make sure everyone knows everyone else. Don't ever start a meeting without being sure everyone at least has a chance to learn each other's name and a little about each other.

- Start with people making personal contact with each other. If that's not possible for some reason, make sure you touch base with everyone yourself, letting them know how welcome they are and that you are aware of whatever is still relevant from your last contact.

- Start on time. Otherwise, some people will make a habit of coming late. Others will be resentful that their time is being wasted waiting. The late people will soon learn that you do start on time, and most of them will find a way to get there.

- Have some refreshments.

- Welcome late-comers, introduce them, and explain to them what you are doing at that moment in the meeting.

- Inform the group of why the absent people could not attend. This establishes that they are still part of the group. It also establishes the expectation that people will contact you if they have to be absent.

- Have a planned, visible agenda with important content. Otherwise, there is a tendency to fill up time with trivia. People need to be in on a plan so they can organize their own participation appropriately. If people feel the chairperson is using their time purposefully, they tend to be more responsible in their own use of time.

- Include in your agenda a review of every specific responsibility that has been previously assigned and is still hanging. If people volunteered to do something, check in to see if it was done or, what help is needed to finish it. If you already know it was done, give the person a chance to report, or appreciate her.

This doesn't mean that the time of the meeting should be spent helping people figure out how to do things - move this quickly, making time outside the meeting to give help if necessary. But, the group does need assurance that everything is being moved forward and that responsibilities are not let dropped.

- Make sure every person speaks fully on every important decision or issue. Every person has important things to say, no matter how shy she is. Let nobody dominate discussion; let nobody be overlooked. A healthy group listens to the thinking of all its members - or it ends up losing the ones who have not been heard.

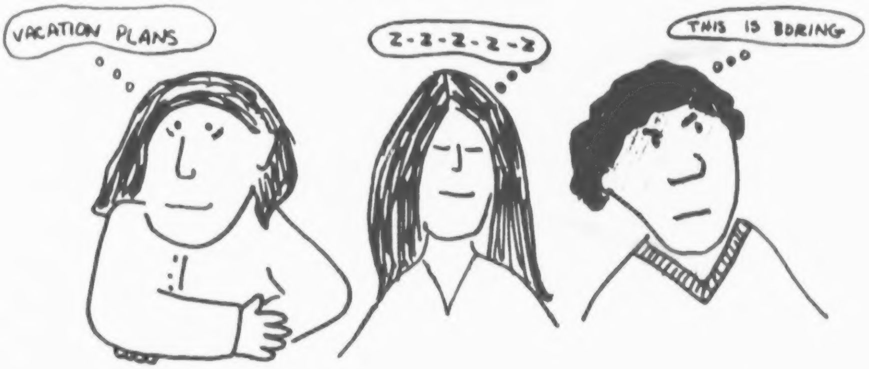
- If, despite all your efforts, one or more people remain silent or withdrawn from discussion, be sure to contact them personally before the next meeting to hear what they were thinking. They may have important objections to voice which they did not feel comfortable expressing to the group, and they may need your support in raising these points. Whatever their reasons, it will be important that you care enough to check in with them.

- Try to reach consensus on every important decision. Discuss until all important objections to the dominant view have been shared and explored. Discuss until the minority who disagree have been thoroughly heard and taken seriously.

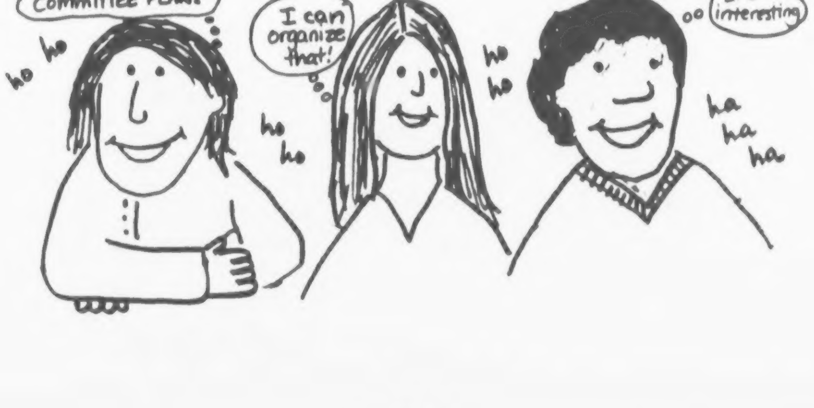
If enthusiastic consensus cannot be reached, ask those in the disagreeing minority if they will consent to go along with the decision and review it after there has been time to test it in practice. If discussion has been thorough, this minority should be small, because the best ideas will have been incorporated into the majority position.

- Make sure that over time, no important area or concern gets repeatedly postponed. A group needs to make progress on all fronts. Even if your resources force you to make slower progress on some fronts than others, this should be stated clearly and a plan followed for when and how the concern will be handled.

If this is not done, morale will be lowered by the feeling that the group, or leader, is not able to handle its whole task. As a result, your other excellent work may be eroded by the weakness that develops from continually putting aside the less urgent concerns.


A MEETING WITHOUT LAUGHTER

- Encourage laughter in your meetings. Serious discussions can get boring or tense; jokes and lightheartedness lift the spirits and bring people together. The work goes faster when people are more relaxed and tuned in.


A MEETING WITH LAUGHTER

- At the end of every meeting, take a few minutes for a closing evaluation. Even a sentence from each person on how the meeting went - what she liked and what could be improved - gives the group a sense of completeness. Nobody has to leave wondering how the others felt. If everyone liked the meeting, morale goes up 100% when this becomes clear. Take time for appreciating each other during this evaluation period.

- Keep good minutes of your meetings and make sure to distribute them to all members, and to all people who might want to know about your progress.

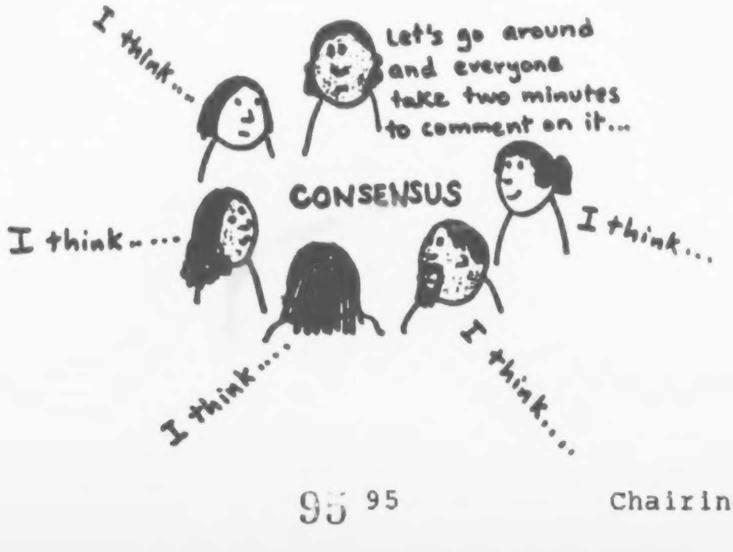
All of the above are important. They may seem obvious once stated, but many groups struggle along for yars without ever putting their attention to these impotant parts of working together. You can save a lot of disappointment by following these suggestions.

What to Do About Some People Talking Too Much Or Too Little

People who talk too much often feel uneasy about dominating, and quiet people usually feel embarassed about being shy. Both groups appreciate a structure that balances things out. Here are some ideas:

- On a controversial issue, use "equal time" where everyone gets to speak for a certain number of minutes on the topic before there is back-and-forth discussion. Often the group as a whole will put out all the pros and cons in an impressive way through this process, so no one has to feel it is up to him to say everything, and everyone can feel impressed with how well the group is functioning as a whole.

- Sometimes use a discussion rule: nobody speaks twice before everybody has spoken once; and nobody speaks four times before everyone has spoken twice. Explain that in fact everyone has important things to say, and the group needs a structure allowing everyone to speak so that no one has to jump in or interrupt in order to be heard.


I think...
Let's go around and everyone take two minutes to comment on it...
CONSENSUS
I think.....
I think...
I think....
I think...

Successful Meetings

A Successful Meeting Accomplishes Five Things:

1. Communicates information
2. Results in decisions being made
3. Assigns tasks and responsibilities
4. Creates a good spirit
5. Helps build the organization or the group.

To Make Good Decisions:

1. Define the problem.
2. Think of all possible solutions.
3. Research missing information.
4. Consult people with relevant experience or wisdom.
5. Decide on best option.
6. Implement the decision.
7. Evaluate the results.

A Good Facilitator

- Opens with personal sharings, song, good news, etc.
- Sets a positive tone
- Encourages the participation of all
- Speaks briefly, is not long-winded
- Does not allow attacks on people or intimidation
- Uses pairings or small groups to:
  - ensure participation by all
  - allow everyone to think through and express ideas fully
  - de-fuse tension
  - change the pace
  - handle work more efficiently
- Calls for a break, an "energizer," or stretch as needed
- Uses "equal time" formats when discussion is complex and energetic
- Keeps to the agreed-upon agenda and times
- Points out areas of agreement on controversial issues
- Summarizes consensus expressed
- Helps define areas to be resolved
- Asks for proposals for change, rather than tolerating demoralizing complaining
- Closes meetings with appreciations and hopeful note

BUILDING READING AND WRITING INTO THE WORK

Consistent with the teachings of Paolo Freire, who has done ground-breaking work teaching literacy to Brazilian peasants, we have found that reading and writing related to the community improvement work holds the interest of the young people.

Reading Out Loud

On principle, we always read minutes of meetings and important documents out loud together in our decision-making committees. This process is important and useful. It insures that people do understand the material. It allows people who do not read so well to follow along and learn the words. It allows people to read out loud in a totally supportive context. It allows the group's guide to teach the meaning of the more obscure vocabulary words in any document.

The young people do want to to learn to read better and increase their vocabulary, but they don't have many supportive small-group opportunities to do so.

We encourage young people to ask the meaning of words, but often they won't. The leader has to stop and ask at the end of the paragraph, "Does anybody know what ________ means?" Usually somebody in the group does, so the information is shared. If, repeatedly, nobody in the group knows the words, the leader should simply explain the ones that she thinks might not be generally understood, so as not to underscore the fact that nobody knows them. It's a good idea to ask the group before they start reading if it's O.K. to stop after each paragraph to explain any unknown words. They will generally be pleased.

Of course, principles of good teaching apply here. Anybody who reads out load should receive complete respect, and a general comment that people are reading very well is reassuring. You have to be careful not to praise some and not others, although a well-placed "Good!" after someone has figured out a hard word is always well-received.

Never Say "No!"

When somebody offers a tentative definition of a hard word, it is important never to say, "No." This may seem overly careful, but it is not. Young people have been told "NO!" millions of times, and it's rarely been a positive experience. The word should never be used in teaching. If someone offers an incorrect definition, the adult can answer, as appropriate, "It should mean that, because it does seem related to the other word which means that, but it doesn't.... It means...." or "That's a logical guess. Oddly enough, it means...." or "That's a good association. I understand why you would think that. This word means...."

Frowns and shakes of the head should be avoided also. It is the leader's job to make it safe for young people who have had bad experiences in school to risk reading and offering their best guess as to the meaning of words. If you make it fully and relaxedly supportive, you'll get comments like, "The best thing about this weekend retreat was that I read out loud better than I've ever read before in my life. I've always been scared, and I've always been a bad reader, but I did well this weekend."

Writing Minutes

Writing is harder. Many schools do a notoriously bad job of teaching writing. When we have paid attention and not been rushed by the tasks of the community improvement project, we have taken the time to teach people how to take minutes of meetings. The best way to do this is to give everybody a pad and pencil, give general instructions about what should be noted down and what is not necessary to note: that is, write down the assignments of tasks and the decisions made, not all the discussion. It's good to stop after a decision to make sure people get it written down; or to stop every half an hour or so to see what people have noted down, and praise what they've got.

This is an extremely difficult discipline to follow, because there is usually so much going on in a meeting that is more interesting than taking notes. But it's worth doing every three or four meetings in order to build the writing and minute-taking skills.

Meanwhile, the adult or a skilled young person has to take the minutes and make sure they are typed up and distributed at the next meeting for collective review. Meetings without minutes lose the possibility of building reading and writing into the on-going work. The lack of minutes also detracts from the seriousness of the committee.

Reading or writing assignments in between meetings have been fruitless. Maybe others can make it work. What we do, we do together.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Giving young people the opportunity to speak their own truth to people with power is a sure path to exhilaration, self-respect, confidence, and intellectual development. This process is diametrically opposed to the past experience of the young people. It directly counteracts past oppression. Every opportunity to arrange this should be taken.

In What Context?

Every form of this is useful: dialogues with visitors to the program from foundations or government; public speeches at hearings and speak-outs; on-going participation on official advisory committees to government officials; television and radio appearances; cultural exchanges with communities which have greater wealth and opportunity; fundraising visits to foundations; appearances on panels at conferences.

Generally speaking, the program must arrange these opportunities, or turn situations which were not originally defined this way into such opportunities. Foundations don't expect directors to bring young people on fundraising visits; but it is almost always a good idea. Public hearings about youth issues are not usually called with the expectation that young people will appear; but when they do they are always a hit. Lobbying meetings rarely include youth; but when they do, the point is more strongly made. When a director is asked to speak or to serve on a committee, it is often possible to persuade the person issuing the invitation that it would be important to include young people. Sometimes you can persuade someone to have young people speak instead of adults.

Society doesn't think in these terms. Young people are rarely expected or included. But, fortunately, people are sufficiently attuned to basic ideas of democracy, that if you suggest young people speaking for themselves it is generally accepted as a good idea, or at least one that people are willing to try, however skeptically. The skepticism is usually based on a lack of confidence in the young people's ability to speak intelligently and to the point. It is quickly dissolved when the young people do speak.

Preparing for the Event

The types of events which require the greatest preparation are public speaking engagements, public hearings, and lobbying meetings.

It is important for the young people to understand the distinction between speaking on behalf of their group and expressing their own personal opinions. The audience should know which is occurring. This concept also protects the group from being misrepresented.

In public hearings and speakouts, when a series of young people will have the chance to speak, each for a brief period, we have found several types of preparation to be useful:

1) Some young people will want to read a statement, after brainstorming and agreeing on points to be made. In this case, the quickest way is for the staff person to sit down at the typewriter with the young person next to her, and ask what the speaker really wants to communicate. Ask questions until something significant and central to that person is rolling off her tongue, and then take it by dictation onto the typewriter, editing slightly, and asking an occasional question for elaboration or clarification. In this way a three-minute statement can be produced in about 20 minutes of one-on-one assistance. The person then practices reading it, looking up and speaking to the audience as much as possible.

2) Some young people will be able to write their own statements, but this is rare among students who do not have strong writing skills or confidence. Usually they will need assistance.

3) To prepare in a group, the best way is often to get the words and feelings flowing through a public speaking workshop.

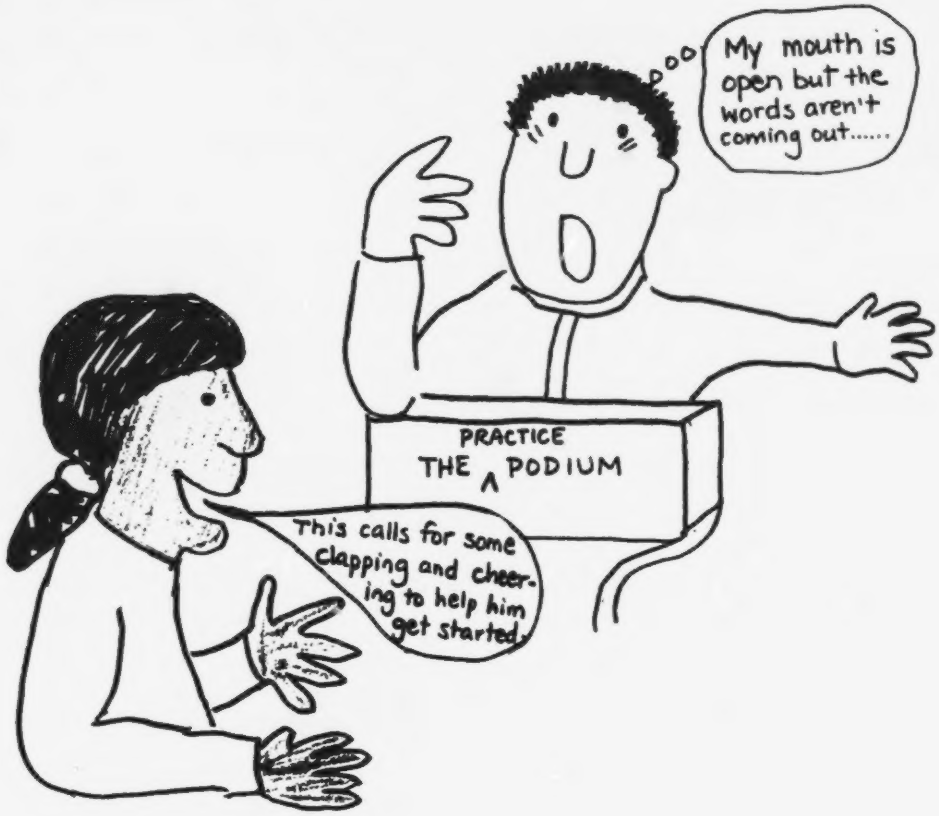
A Public Speaking Workshop

- The leader explains the event and the issues.

- People are invited to brainstorm about what ideas they would most like to communicate. When everyone hears the array of ideas that others have, it stimulates thinking and feeling. It may be done in small groups also, after a group brainstorm, giving each person three minutes to talk about the issues.

- People are invited to stand up in front of the group, with some kind of podium, to speak from the heart to the group about the issues.

- After each person speaks, great clapping and even cheering is brought forth from the group. Clapping has a wonderful effect. Often if people become tongue-tied in front of the group, the best way to free up their mental paralysis is to cheerlead for them, causing the group to clap. Clapping as someone goes to the podium is also helpful.


My mouth is open but the words aren't coming out......
THE PRACTICE PODIUM
This calls for some clapping and cheering to help him get started.

- After each person, the group is asked, "What was good about her speech, and what suggestions for improvement do you have?" Nobody can make a suggestion without first praising. Generally the balance of praise to suggestion should be managed so that there is about four times more praise, yet it is important that helpful suggestions do get made, because the commitment to each other's development and to the group's highest standards is expressed that way. It also gives the process more credibility for the young people.

- Everyone should be encouraged to stand up, even if she simply introduces herself and sits back down. For some people, overcoming shyness enough to even walk to the podium is a major step forward. All should be applauded, and the leader needs to verbalize what is going on as a process of overcoming shyness and fear. Some people will cry and others will tremble. Some will giggle hysterically. The leader may need to say that when there is fear, when there have been bad experiences, sometimes crying or shaking or laughing is necessary to overcome them, and it's fine. It's all part of the process of gaining strength and confidence.

A Series of Workshops

Often a series of such workshops is useful before a major event. Sometimes we have met once a week for as many as fifteen weeks, each time letting people speak extemporaneously, from the heart, saying what they most want to say. Each workshop brings forth greater eloquence and overcomes more shyness. By the end, we have many people able to stand up at a microphone, in places as intimidating as the City Council, and speak without notes, saying what they deeply believe. It makes quite an impression.

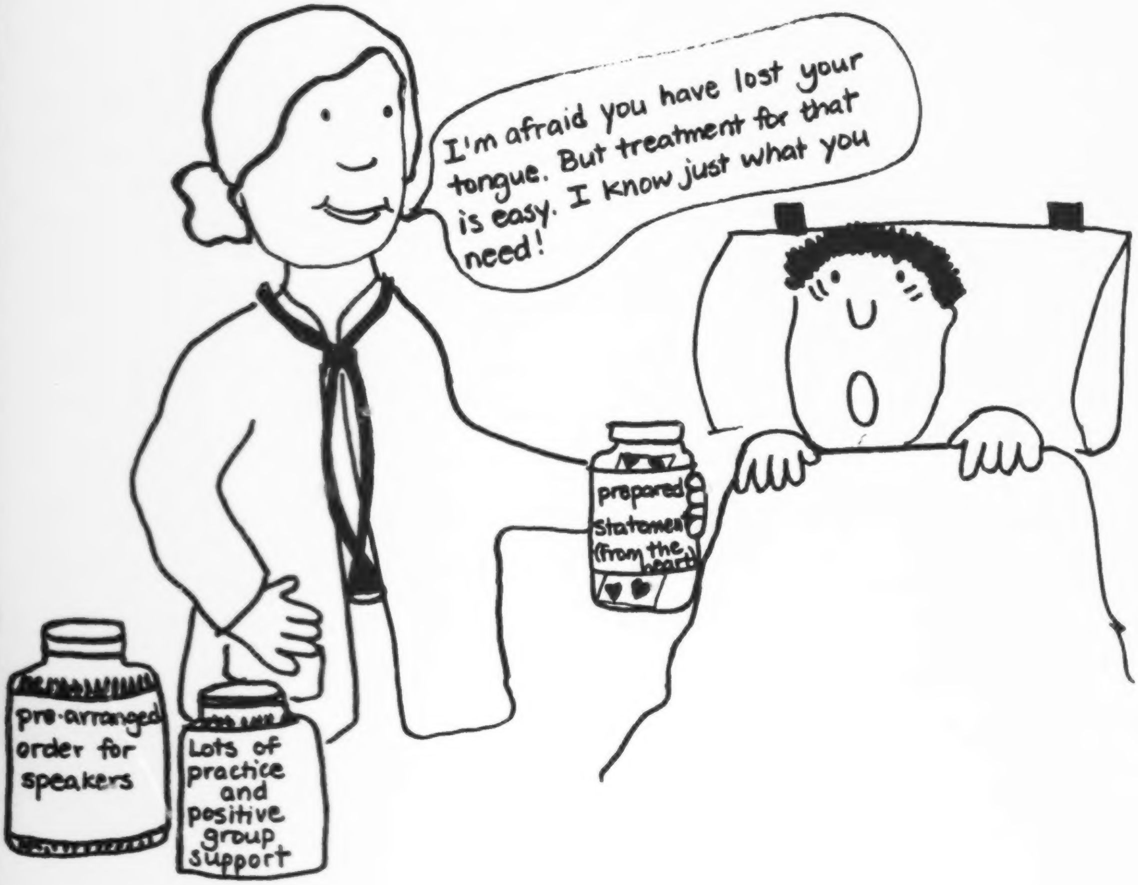
Alternatively, after a workshop or two, people can be helped to write out their speeches, or dictate their speeches, so that they are prepared to speak, without fear of losing their tongues. They can be encouraged to start from their prepared speeches, and then take off, adding more if the spirit moves them. This is very effective, because having the written speech minimizes nervousness.

Speak-Out

When preparing for a speak-out, it is important to assign initial speakers. It can't be left to the moment. The first ten speakers need to know who they are, and in what order they are committed to speak. After that, you can leave it to participants in the audience to come forward spontaneously.

Don't Mimic Professional Adult Speeches

The content of the speech will be most effective if it is the perceptions, vision, experience, and recommendations of the young person. It ought not to be an effort to cite facts and figures, to act like a professional, to achieve some formally acceptable presentation. Most professional testimonies are extremely boring, so there is no reason to emulate them. Further, the effort to master alien information makes the speech an alienated speech. It is more important to bring out what the young people already know and nobody else knows, bring in their own genuine expertise, to be heard by the policy-makers. Their expertise needs to be validated.


I'm afraid you have lost your tongue. But treatment for that is easy. I know just what you need!
prepared statement (from the heart)
pre-arranged order for speakers
Lots of practice and positive group support

It is acceptable to read a testimony out loud, even if the reading is a struggle. The audience will be suitably impressed by the effort and the struggle. But if there is a series of speeches, there ought to be some that are free, from the heart, to the audience, without the intermediary of paper and arduous translation from written to spoken word.

THE WEEKEND RETREAT

There is nothing like a weekend retreat. If well handled, a leadership group invariably returns with a sense of family, a seriousness of purpose, increased confidence, and enhanced skill.

Tone, pacing, and content are the key elements in handling it well.

Components of a Successful Retreat

A balance of several elements is ideal:

- Personal support, with emphasis on getting to know each other and assisting each other's development into leaders;

- Training in specific skills that can be mastered or that can be practiced on the spot;

- Discussion of new and profound ideas, which help people understand current reality - either psychology, politics, economics, or a vision of what we can do together;

- Introduction of new information that prepares people to deal with the task at hand;

- Recreation that includes group games outdoors and open unstructured time;

- Acceptance of personal feelings, if the safety of the situation causes strong feelings to surface. Oftentimes the key role of the adult is to provide a shoulder to cry on.

Given the above general elements, let's look at a report of a particular weekend retreat, for details of implementation.

Policy Committee Initial Training Retreat

The group was small, including three thirteen-year-olds and two eighteen-year-olds. While the two older ones were more comfortable speaking, their academic skill level was not necessarily higher, nor was their leadership experience much more extensive, so the age differences did not create difficulty. In fact, the ability of the older ones to be supportive to the younger ones, to listen to them on a personal level, was a definite plus.

The purpose of the weekend was to develop an identity as the governing policy committee of Youth Action Program. New members had just been elected, and they didn't know each other nor did they have much background information preparing them for their new role. There was an enormous amount of information that could have been covered, so we had choices as we went along regarding what would fit the mood and what would be sufficient variation to keep the interest level high.

FRIDAY

First we gave out beautiful folders with about eight documents in them for use during the weekend. This immediately gave a sense of importance and purpose to the weekend. Everyone loved the professional folders.

Then we laid out the rough schedule and content of the weekend, and briefly discussed the nature of leadership and why their role was important.

All shared examples of leaders they admire. Interestingly, most people described one of their parents, and there were no examples from the young people of public figures, either current or historical.

The core of the evening was each person taking five minutes to talk about herself. The question posed was, "Who am I. . . what do I believe in, what have I lived through that has shaped me, and where am I going?" But the group was too shy for such an all-encompassing question, and too shy to talk uninterrupted for five minutes, so in process we changed it to five minutes in which the members of the group asked any questions they wanted. This kept every member engaged, and assured the speaker that people were actually interested in what she had to say. In fact, each person's turn tended to carry on for about seven or eight minutes.

Questions asked included, "What is your biggest achievement in life?" "Who was your first boyfriend and why did you like him?" "Have you ever been in a big fight?" "Who are the five people you trust the most in the world?" "Why did you decide to be on the Policy Committee?" "What was it like for you growing up in your neighborhood?" "Have you ever had your heart broken?" Some people simply asked, "How old are you?" "What school do you go to?" or whatever other question they happened to think of.

After each person's turn, everybody took a turn to say what she liked about the person so far, through these first impressions and from what they had shared.

There was lots of laughter, and the level of attention was very high, because everyone's mind was engaged throughout, if not answering questions then thinking of them. The group definitely got closer.

Then we sat around eating pickles and peanut butter and jelly until about 11:30.

Helpful Guidelines

General comments: while the precise content of the above can vary, there are certain reliable rules that always work:

1) Everybody gets equal time for group attention, including the adults.

2) Comments at the outset about the quality of attention being really important are always helpful reminders.

3) Everybody should get appreciated by everybody before the evening is over. Building a sense of group safety can be consciously done in this way, counteracting the insecurity everybody feels in a new group, and building a group norm of positive interactions rather than snapping. It doesn't happen by itself; but there is no resistance to it when the leader establishes it.

4) The adult consciously lays back whenever possible, facilitating the group's interaction but not dominating it. For example, when questions are being asked, the adult does not ask more than her share, but does ask questions which tend to increase the closeness. The adult would never, for example, ask how old someone is or what school she goes to, because a young person is likely to think of those questions, but she might ask if the person's ever been heartbroken, to up the ante a little.

5) If the group is large, it should be divided into groups of four to eight, to enable closeness to develop through equal time sharing.

SATURDAY

After a brief go-round in which all shared how they were feeling, our morning session focused on "How to Lead Good Meetings." We followed a sequence of steps designed to develop skills in note-taking, public speaking, reading, and memorizing new material. This kept the pace active, while giving adequate repetition for the young people to actually master some new material about leading meetings.

We asked the young people to take notes on a short talk about good meetings. We explained that taking notes was a necessary skill for college, but that it was rarely taught in junior high school or high school. Further, taking minutes in meetings is a very important skill, and hardly any young people know how to do it.

The adult spoke for about five minutes, then stopped and let each young person read back her notes. We did this about three times, and each time the note-taking was improved. The repetition was also important for getting the information across. Of course, the adult praised whatever notes the young people had taken, thinking of appropriate praise for the level shown, for example, "O.K., good, that's a good start, you got the first point I made," up to, "Terrific, you got it all."

This is a very school-like process, but the difference is that everyone gets equal attention, and everyone's work is warmly received, and the commitment to developing everyone's skill is palpable. So it's pleasurable.

Then, when the pace needed to be changed, after about half an hour, we switched to public speaking practice, inviting people to stand up before us and tell us what they had learned about meetings. We, of course, clapped enthusiastically, whatever they said. The point wasn't to improve delivery, just to become confident standing in front of the group; the other point was to reinforce the material being learned.

To change the pace again, we read out loud a paper that described the elements of good meetings. For some people, reading out loud is a definite challenge. For others, it's their chance to show how smart they are. For everyone, it's a chance to learn new vocabulary. The adult made sure to give the group a chance to define new words, or defined the words for them if none of the young people knew the definition.

When asking for the definitions, the adult avoided the use of the word, "No." Students have been told they're wrong too often, and every "no" discourages the shy students from giving it a try. "That's a good guess," or "That's in the right direction," are usually possible types of responses when somebody offers an incorrect definition.

Finally, for one more reinforcement of the ideas, we turned to another article about meetings which was illustrated with ten or fifteen cartoons, which we looked at together.

Much of the content of the material was about meeting process. It included the importance of giving supportive attention to all members so they could share their best thinking without fear; giving everyone equal time on controversial issues; keeping a light tone with jokes to avoid boredom; and reaching consensus that takes everyones ideas into account rather than "winning" a vote by majority rules, etc.

Then we put up a chart that showed the sequential structure of most meetings, as follows:

BASIC AGENDA OUTLINE

1) Introduce ourselves or touch base
2) Read the minutes from the last meeting
3) Correct and approve the minutes
4) Go over the agenda for this meeting
5) Review past assignments of tasks
6) Complete old business
7) Discuss new business
8) Review new assignments of tasks
9) Evaluate the meeting
10) Appreciate each other.

Since we had been working for an hour and a half, we broke for recreation, and when we re-grouped several hours later, after volleyball, canoeing, hiking, baseball, and lunch, we took an hour to consolidate what we had covered in the morning. The sequence of ten steps in a meeting was specific enough to lend itself to memorization, and broadly applicable enough to allow anyone to chair a meeting just by going through these steps.

So we took down the chart, and let people reconstruct it, with one of the young people standing at the chart and the others telling her what to write.

Mastering the Material

Then we explained some methods for memorizing, and had everyone take a turn reciting the ten steps, with her back to the chart. This was challenging, and took most people several tries. Like taking notes, mastering material is not usually taught in school. The teachers usually put out the information, then later test people, and those who know it do well, and the rest fail. . . time after time after time.

We stuck with it until everyone had memorized the chart and could recite it verbally.

Then we had a "quiz," while the information was fresh in people's minds, as one more way to reinforce it. Everyone's quiz paper was flambuoyantly marked "100%, A" with a big blue magic marker, and someone said, "I'm going to keep this in my folder forever."

Good Teaching Principles

All of this was simply good teaching, following these principles:

- Completely supportive atmosphere of welcome and praise and commitment to each student's success and growth, with no competition between them.

- Use of as many senses and approaches as possible, to change the pace and to get maximum repetition through different "media" - oral, verbal, written, standing, sitting, listening to the teacher, listening to each other, and looking at pictures.

- Having a manageable task that everyone could master completely and therefore successfully.

- Selection of material which was seen as relevant and which could be used immediately.

Immediate Practice

As soon as we had mastered this list, in subsequent meetings we began to take turns having different members lead the meetings, taking us through the ten steps, turning the meeting over to the adult only for new business. Thus the information was put into context and the skill practiced immediately.

Again we took a break for recreation, walking around the pond, planting flowers, sports, and quiet indoor games.

Personal Development

We re-grouped at 5:00 p.m. for a session on our own personal leadership development. After focusing on a skill, we felt it was a good time to deal with ourselves.

We talked about how people are consistently put down and hurt, how hard it is for people to really like themselves and feel confident when they have experienced such put downs, and how helping each other become leaders includes helping each other appreciate ourselves.

We started with each person taking a turn to say what she liked about herself. The point was made that some people have a hard time thinking of anything, while others do have a whole list but usually still have some areas where they feel very insecure.

Self-appreciation was easier for some than for others, but everyone was able to do it. The adult then asked if people would like to try appreciating themselves in areas where they felt insecure, to begin to counteract those feelings. One member, who was near tears, asked how to do it, and the adult said that whatever bad things were coming into her mind should be turned around. She should say the direct opposite! To do this she needed a lot of support from the adult - reassurance that it was not lying, that she really was good, that she was born good and any other feeling was just hurts she'd picked up along the way. She was finally able to agree that her true self was good, and she cried on the adult's shoulder. Immediately afterward she said she felt better and all in the group told her why they liked and admired her.

Another person volunteered to compliment herself, and found it very easy, except that she couldn't do it looking directly at anyone. She was looking at the floor or ceiling, so we encouraged her to look at someone, and this brought lots of laughter because it was so embarrassing. We cheered her on and it was fun for everyone.

The third person had not dared in the morning to stand up in front of the group and recite the steps of a meeting, so we encouraged him to take that step and he did, with definite satisfaction.

At that point we adjourned for a turkey dinner!

Important Information

After dinner we had a two-and-a-half-hour meeting, with a couple of breaks for games. The evening was devoted to understanding Youth Action Program's organizational chart, budget, and objectives for the year.

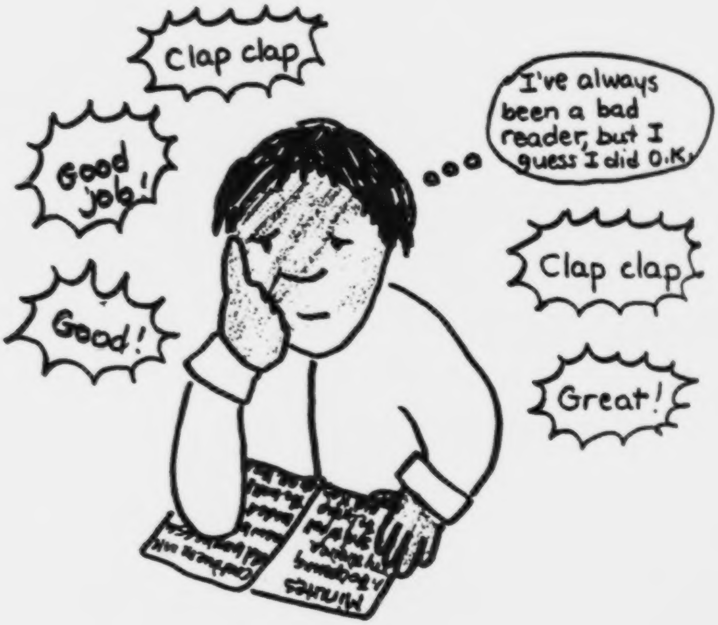
We started from what people knew, developing the organizational chart together. The questions asked were: what are the projects, who's in charge of each, who works on each one, what groups make decisions about each one? The adult drew the chart while the young people called out the information. Members of the group weren't able to draw a chart themselves, but they did have all the information that went on it.

Then, seeing the organizational chart, we went quickly over the budget line by line, noting any changes, and noting down issues related to the budget that need discussion eventually. Since the budget is by project, and by person, it relates nicely to the organizational chart.

After a break, during which we played the sock game (all take off their shoes, sit on the floor, and attempt to take off each others' socks - the winner is the last one with a sock on), we read out loud our five page description of goals and objectives, noted some that needed special attention, and added some new ones.

This was a lot of information, but none of it had to be mastered. It merely had to be brought into awareness and reviewed. The general impact was that people were impressed at the size and scope and importance of what we are doing. Realizing that the policy committee is the governing group and is responsible for all this money and program and staff is awesome.

One member was particularly impressed with himself for having read so much out loud, so well. The continually increasing safety of the group had enabled him to read better than he ever had. It was his high point of the weekend.


Clap clap
Good job!
I've always been a bad reader, but I guess I did O.K.
Clap clap
Good!
Great!
Minutes

The seriousness of the subject opened it up for our making some points about how Policy Committee members are expected to treat staff, and handle the information about budget. Simply, it is not public information, it's nobody's business but ours and the staff's. In addition, the credibility of the Policy Committee and the whole concept of youth governance depends on the Committee members being responsible and treating staff with concern and respect. The difference between power for its own sake and leadership to make things go right was elaborated. We had started out with that point on Friday night.

After our chairperson had us evaluate the evening and appreciate each other, we broke for quiet games and sleep.

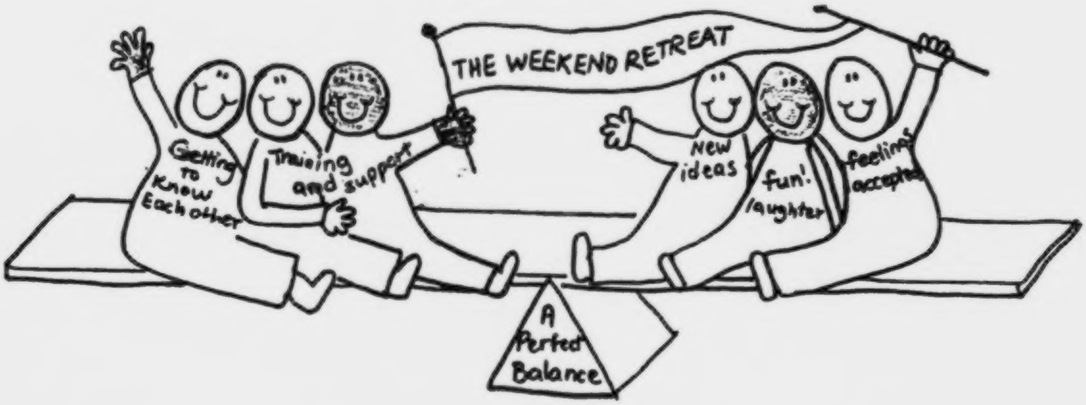
SUNDAY

Another young person chaired the Sunday meeting.

The group chose our focus from among several possibilities. They didn't want to do either the guidelines of the Policy Committee or the training in interviewing until the full Policy Committee could do it together.

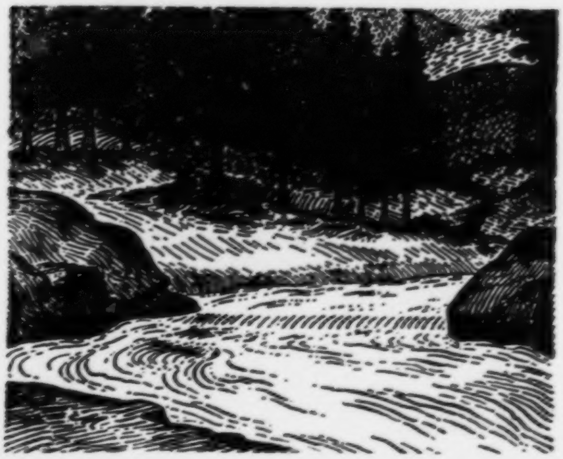
Important Discussion

They chose to read the paper "What We Have Learned in Four Years," and it led to a good discussion on whether children ever deserve to be beaten by their parents; whether Black people should blame White people for their problems; and whether there's a way to change the conditions of people through united and rational action. They all found this session "wonderful."



The rest of the morning was recreation, and a rapid clean-up. On the way to the bus we did a self-evaluation, in which everyone said what she thought she had done well this weekend and what she would like to improve on. Then everyone else gave each person feedback. This brought a nice closure to the weekend, although it was a little rushed in the car, and had to be done in two groups because we had two rides to the bus.

By the end the group was nicely knit together, with the two older ones playing an excellent supportive role and everyone feeling comfortable with each other. We had a relaxing, fun weekend in which we also learned a lot. Not one problem or difficulty arose during the weekend, because it was a particularly thoughtful, responsible, and small group of selected leaders. A lot of progress was made in overcoming shyness.



Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10029
Phone: 212-860-8170

Element Four

EXPERIENCING SUCCESS

EXPERIENCING SUCCESS

It is a cliche that people must achieve success in order to build confidence. It may seem so obvious that it hardly needs mention. However, while it is a cliche, it is too rarely achieved, and too rarely examined.

What counts as success? How much success is needed to transform an individual life? How much success is needed to drive a community organization? How much to inspire or transform a community? What is the long-range goal of youth organizing, and what constitutes success along that road?

S
U
C
C
E
S
S
Learning this was hard work!
DON'T TRY. DO

Two Levels of Leadership Development

There are really two levels on which youth leadership development must be understood. The first is that which occurs within any program or school. We are convinced that any program involving youth will be a better program if it engages young people in significant decision-making and leadership within the program.

The second level is that which is done to have an impact on the community outside the program. Any program attempting to organize young people to have an impact on the community must set very high standards of achievement. In this second category, it is not enough to have activities that educate the young people. The work must have significant and visible results.

> "Most of the guys in our crew were trouble-makers. So was I at one time. We started with no money, no support. We got together with other people and formed the Youth Action program. We put in four years, we trained 400 young people, we built a building, we changed our lives."
>
> - John Sainz, at age 19, 1984

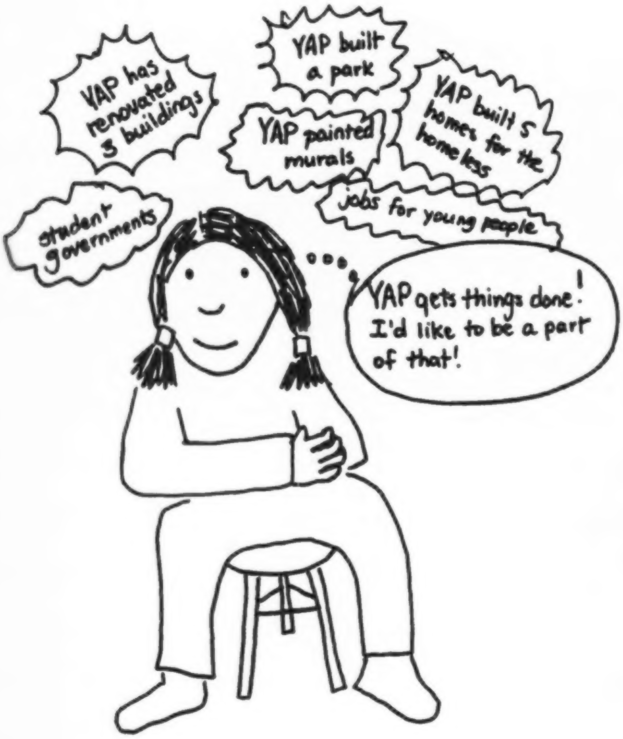
Oftentimes "social service" programs go through the motions of doing something that will help the community. Having given up on really changing anything, or really inspiring anybody, they measure out a little help here and a little help there, filling some gaps and making some heartfelt gestures toward a better community. They "do the best they can under difficult circumstances."

However, if we are to inspire and organize young people, we have to do much better than that. If we are actually to improve the conditions in which people live, we have to put forth a higher standard. We have to succeed at doing things nobody believes possible.

> "In the two years I've been at YAP, there's nothing we've ever said we were going to do that we haven't actually done. It's amazing. It gives me faith. It gives me the courage to stick wih the things I care about."
>
> - Puma Lee Santiago, at age 17, 1981

Taking On Important Projects

Young people have big ideas. They want to do things that are important. While they may be mired in powerlessness to start with, when their yearnings are unearthed, they come forth with big ideas, not little ones. They haven't settled for inching along on the positive road just because it's right. If they're going to get involved, they want it to be important and dramatic. They haven't attained a "balanced" life in which they protect themselves from too much effort, too much strain, too much disappointment. They possess an enormous reserve of energy for good, if they believe there is a chance of doing something really important.


YAP has renovated 3 buildings
YAP built a park
YAP built 5 homes for the homeless
YAP painted murals
student governments
jobs for young people
YAP gets things done! I'd like to be a part of that!

This means the adults who work with them as community organizers must have tremendous optimism and determination.

Examples of Success at Youth Action Program

The successes achieved at Youth Action Program are instructive. Community improvement projects designed and governed by young people, staffed by committed adults, have succeeded, among other things, in doing the following:

- full gut rehabilitation of three abandoned buildings, providing 39 units of housing for homeless people;
- acquisition of five adjacent lots and construction of a playground;
- painting of three large community murals;
- establishment of five cooperative residences for homeless teenagers and their children;
- renovation of two unused buildings to create community centers;
- organizing of a coalition that persuaded the City to provide jobs and education to 6,000 teenagers a year.

These are tangible, visible, important results of youth imvolvement. Each of them represents incredible output of work on the part of adults as well as young people.

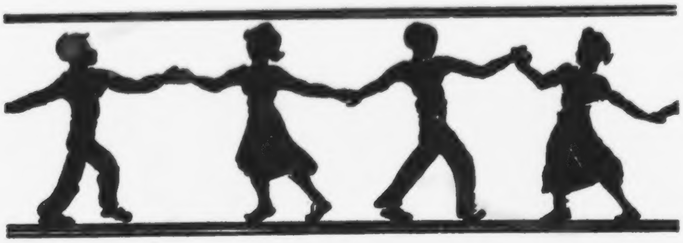
The job of organizing community improvement projects is a big one, and will take hard work, beyond the call of duty. It will also result in great satisfaction!

What Constitutes Success

Of course, on the first level of leadership development - that is, leadership within the program - success can be measured incrementally. Leading a good meeting, making a good speech, raising funds through presentation to a foundation, increasing reading scores, passing a test, hiring a staff person who is an excellent choice, getting full attendance at a meeting and covering the entire agenda in good spirits: these and many other experiences provide good feeling and confidence. They will help individuals grow and become increasingly responsible. They are worth doing, and worth doing well. They should be recognized and praised.

The same things must be done well in a community improvement project whose ultimate goal is impact on the community. The difference is that in the latter case these small successes are not sufficient. The final goal is the completion of an ambitious project designed by the young people.

When the project is done, you will hear comments like this, overheard at the ribbon-cutting of one of our buildings, as a young man strode out onto the steps, raised both his arms high into the air, and exclaimed to nobody in particular, "FINALLY, we're HEROES!"



Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10029
(212) 860-8170

Element Five

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT WORLD ISSUES

* Leadership School Curriculum

LEADERSHIP SCHOOL CURRICULUM

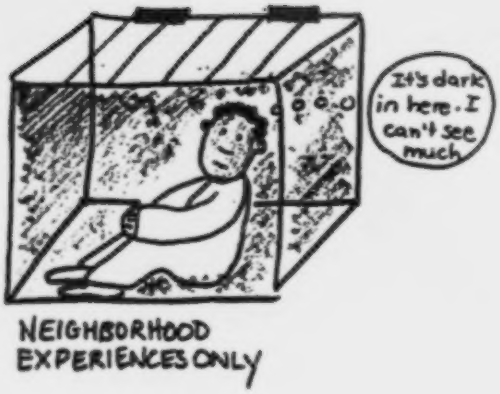
Our schools are not teaching what is really going on in the world. Students complain that history classes never get beyond the Second World War, and social studies classes don't deal with the burning issues of the day. They do not deal in sufficient depth with culture, class, race, street life, sex, conflict resolution, politics, and the heritage of the students. As one young man put it, "When I graduated from a New York City high school, I still thought Chinese people pushed carts and African people wore loincloths."

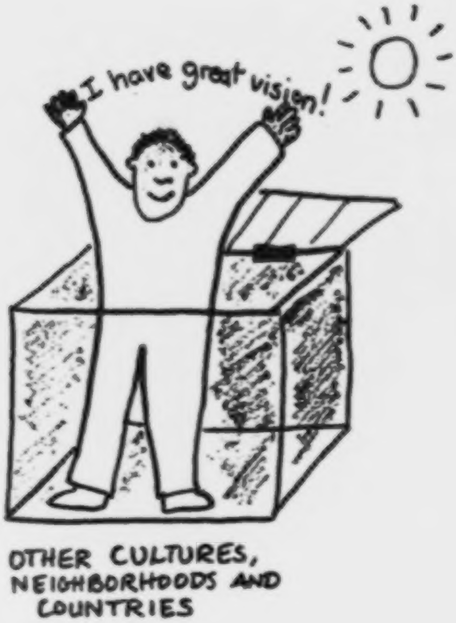
Someone has to fill the vacuum. A youth program can either put pressure on the schools to improve the curriculum, or can develop a curriculum of its own. At the end of this section is an outline of the curriculum we developed at Youth Action Program to respond to the intellectual interests of the student leaders.

Of course, the best curriculum is based on experience. Trips to other cultures, countries, and neighborhoods are excellent. Visitors from from all over the world who talk about their reality have great impact. When the Children of War Tour comes to Youth Action Program, bringing teenagers from war-torn areas around the world who tell about their own experiences, everyone is excited to learn about conditions all over the world, and to think what can be done.

The ultimate goal of leadership development is to motivate people to take responsibility for the future of humanity. Thinking in this direction raises many questions: Is it hopeless? Can I personally do anything? Is human nature good or bad? How did we get into such a mess anyway? Can we ever get enough unity to fix things up? Does power corrupt everybody? These are the issues we should be addressing.

It is important not to limit young people to thinking about their own community or their own ethnic group. Experience starts at home, but vision doesn't stop at the borders of the neighborhood.


It's dark in here. I can't see much
NEIGHBORHOOD EXPERIENCES ONLY


I have great vision!
OTHER CULTURES, NEIGHBORHOODS AND COUNTRIES

Leadership School Curriculum

This curriculum was developed in response to the questions insistently raised by young people at Youth Action Program.

Cycle 1: CURRENT REALITY: How are things now and why are they that way?

I. Community Economics

Basic explanation of economic concepts and exploration of opposing explanations of economic problems facing East Harlem and the United States. Comparison of different economic systems.

II. United States Government and Political System

Basic structure and process of government: three branches of government; federal and local relationships; legislative process; elections and voting; two-party system. Comparison with other political systems.

III. Current Affairs

Study of current crises and important issues. Research, study, and debate on opposing viewpoints and interpretation of current local, national, and international issues.

IV. East Harlem Political Structure and Issues

How are decisions made in East Harlem affecting us? What are the basic outlines of issues in education, housing, crime, employment, drugs, welfare?

V. Growing Up in East Harlem; Relating to Each Other

Issues of identity, intimate and peer group relationships, family, communication, and difficult realities faced by young people growing up in East Harlem.

Cycle 2: METHODS OF CHANGE: How would we like things to be, and how can they be changed?

This cycle will begin with an orientation focused on how we would like things to be. The students will develop a view of the future of East Harlem as they would design it if they could.

I. History and Methods of Selected Movements

How people have tried to bring about change in their societies in the past; some case studies: American revolution, abolition of slavery, Civil Rights movement, labor movement, women's movement; review of several other countries: Brazil, China, France, Sweden, Soviet Union, Cuba, Chile, Kenya, Mozambique, Japan.

II. Leadership Theory and Theories of Change

Historical leaders will be studied and evaluated: their biographies, theories, methods, and leadership qualities. Examples: Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Susan B. Anthony, Mao Tse Tung, Mahatma Ghandi, Julius Nyerere, Fidel Castro, Jesus of Nazareth, Cesar Chavez, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Cory Aquino, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler.

III. Methods of Changing Ourselves

Viewing ourselves as potential leaders, what changes do we need to make? What are the current ideas and traditional methods of personal change that we could use to help ourselves: religion, psychiatry, Eastern doctrines (martial arts, meditation, zen), group therapies, EST, scientology, re-evaluation counseling, mutual support and criticism, peer counseling. What methods of overcoming personal addictions, like alcoholism and smoking, have worked?

IV. Organizing for Change in Our Community

Theory and methods of community organizing. What can be done by an individual or group on the local level? Defining issues; program for change; gaining unity; finding allies; pulling the group together and holding it together through an active campaign; handling the opposition.

Cycle 3: CULTURE AND HUMAN DYNAMICS

How do human psychology and culture relate to change? Can people change enough and treat each other with enough respect to make it worthwhile to try to improve society?

I. Culture and History of Puerto Ricans and Blacks

Study of the historical struggles and cultural roots of Blacks and Puerto Ricans, with an emphasis on their role in the United States.

II. Cultural History of Major Groups in the United States

A history of the various cultures within the United States. A look at how they got here, what important contributions they brought with them, what obstacles they have faced: Black culture - African American, West Indian; Latin culture - Mexican, Latin American, Central American; Asian culture - Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Cambodian, Vietnamese; Native American Culture - Navaho, Hopi; White cultures - Anglo-Saxon, Irish, Italian, Jewish, other ethnic groups. How these cultures relate to the dominant American overall culture. What is the overall culture?

III. Culture in Our Lives

How does culture affect our daily lives? Life experiences, discussion of values, art, spiritualism, religions, child rearing, ways of doing things, concepts of privacy, time, money, sharing, etc. Comparison of our cultural and cross-cultural influences as an approach to understanding ourselves and each other.

IV. Human Nature and Society

What do these systems and philosophies assume about human nature: capitalist, socialist, democratic, communist, totalitarian, facist, early African and Native American? How do Christianity, Confucianism, Judaism, Buddhism fit into this? What are the real needs of human beings which society must be organized to meet? How have different societies attemped to meet and/or control human nature and needs? What is the role of leadership in sustaining a humane society? How much of a culture depends on the system and how much on the people living within it?

Cycle 4: LEADERSHIP SKILLS

I. Public Speaking and Oral Communication

Planning and delivering a talk to an audience; debating skills; being interviewed; making space for oneself in a discussion; insisting on being listened to; interrupting people who talk too much; knowing your audience; setting the tone; knowing your subject; using vivid examples; improving pronounciation and vocabulary. Tape reorders, videotape, debating contests, assignments to do speeches in the community, group feedback, will be used.

II. General Organizational Skills

Running meetings: setting agenda, chairing, taking minutes, making decisions; planning: putting things in order of sequence to reach desired result, mapping out schedules, making work plans for self and others; budgeting: planning own use of money, organization's use of money; interpersonal relations: handling disagreements, "he-say, she-say" (gossip and rumor), snapping, paranoia, etc.

III. Writing Skills

Writing will have been built into past cycles. This course will put specific emphasis on resume writing, proposal writing, position papers, letters. A high standard will be set for organization, grammatical correctness, clarity of ideas, and spelling.

IV. Techniques of Peer Counseling

The techniques of peer counseling and support will be presented and practiced in this course. Skills necessary to create good environments for one-to-one sharing, support, methods of dealing with painful experiences.

Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10029
(212) 860-8170

IN PRAISE OF STUDY

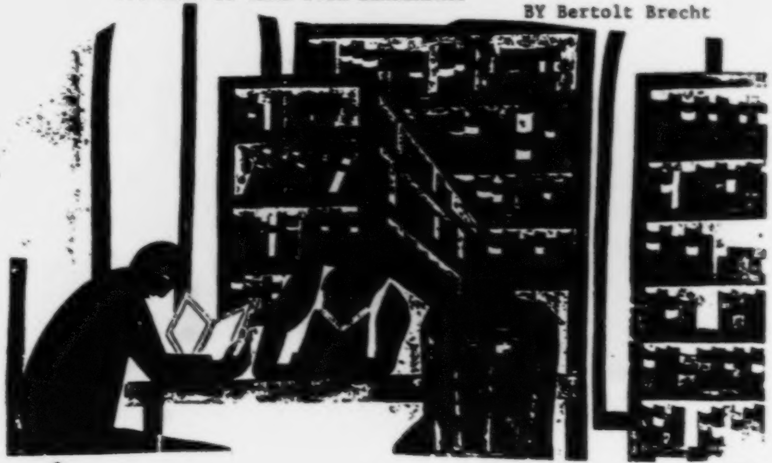
STUDY THE SIMPLE THINGS.
FOR THOSE WHOSE HOUR IS STRUCK IT CAN NEVER BE TOO LATE.
STUDY THE A B C; IT IS NOT ENOUGH, BUT STUDY IT.
DON'T LET IT GET YOU DOWN BUT BEGIN TO LEARN EVERYTHING.
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP.
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP.

STUDY, YOU THERE IN HIDING!
STUDY, YOU THERE IN PRISON!
YOU THERE, WIFE IN YOUR KITCHEN!
YOU THERE, MAN OF SIXTY!
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER THE LEADERSHIP.

YOU THERE WITHOUT A ROOF HUNT UP A SCHOOL!
YOU THERE, WHO ARE FREEZING, LEARN TO KNOW!
YOU WHO ARE STARVING, REACH FOR A BOOK, FOR IT IS A WEAPON.
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP.
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP.

COMRADE, DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS!
DON'T LET THEM TELL YOU BUT LOOK FOR YOURSELF!
WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW YOURSELF, YOU DON'T KNOW.
EXAMINE THE BILL SINCE YOU HAVE TO PAY IT!
PUT YOUR FINGER ON EVERY ITEM:
ASK HOW DID IT GET THERE?
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP.
YOU HAVE TO TAKE OVER LEADERSHIP

BY Bertolt Brecht



Jacob Lawrence

Element Six

OVERCOMING ACADEMIC DEFICIENCIES AND RESOLVING PERSONAL HANG-UPS

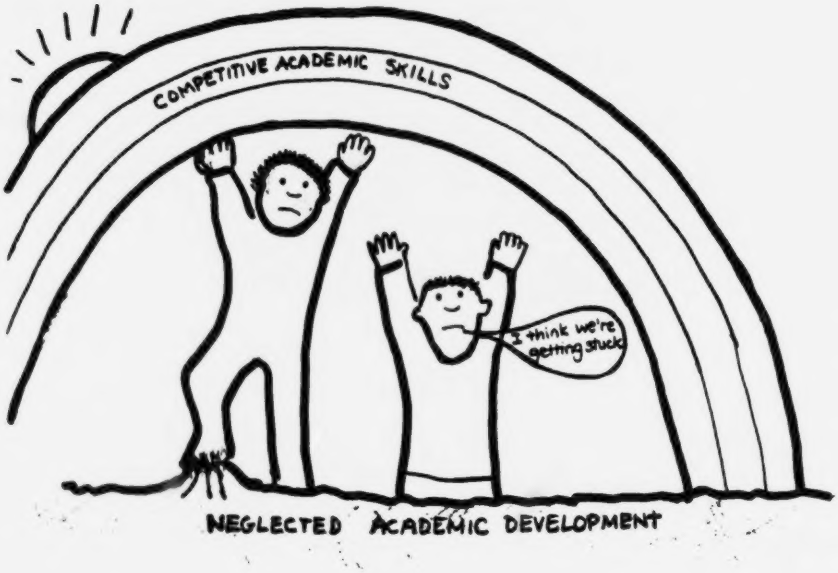
- Correcting Academic Deficiencies
- Helping Leaders Grow Out of Personal Hang-ups
- Underlying Doubts

CORRECTING ACADEMIC DEFICIENCIES

Correcting academic deficiencies is important. If the leaders can't read well, can't write, and can't speak standard English when they choose to, their ability to exercise leadership will be limited.

Of course, we all know exceptional people who have excelled without academic skills, because they are so smart, honorable, and charismatic. It is possible for such a person to speak eloquently in her own dialect and to have others do her writing for her. The world is, ultimately, open to any individual who is smart, good, determined, honest, likeable, and willing to take responsibility.

But this fact is no excuse to leave young people stuck without competitive academic skills.


COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC SKILLS
I think we're getting stuck
NEGLECTED ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

For a few years at Youth Action Program we neglected the academic development of our young people. Our resources were limited. Achieving the ambitious community improvement goals laid out by the young people, and developing leadership skills was all we could manage. The schools were in charge of teaching basic skills.

But it did not happen that all the young leaders naturally found ways to fill their academic gaps. Rather, some of them went forward, with big ideas, but still lacking the skills to implement them.

Seize Every Opportunity

As a result, we have now seized every opportunity to institute tutoring programs, mentor programs, life-planning programs, academic advocacy, GED programs, scholarship programs, and every other kind of support to the young people to develop their academic skills.

Earning Rates Affected by Academic Level

The research put out by the Children's Defense Fund, showing that between 1978 and 1986 the earning rates of young men between 20 and 24 had dropped 40%, and that the earning rate was directly affected by the level of academic skill, had an impact on us. Reality had actually changed between the 1978 founding of Youth Action Program and the 1986 re-assessment of the importance of our teaching academic skills. The shift in availability of jobs from manufacturing to services was under way, and had led to a definite loss of income for people without academic skills.

We recommend that all youth programs put a steady and powerful emphasis on developing academic skills. If you can figure out how to improve your local public schools, so they do the job, then more power to you! In the meantime, you have to supplement what they are doing.

Intelligence is Independent of Academic Skill

But at the same time, it is important not to invalidate the young people's intelligence by making academic proficiency the measure of a person's intelligence. It is important not to buy into the incorrect and debilitating idea that people who are less well educated or who do not speak standard English have less right to be heard.

It is important not to force people to write well before they can speak out, or to talk grammatically correct English before they can be taken seriously, or to get their high school diploma before they have any right to influence the group. Intelligence is independent of academic skill. Intelligence is independent of education.

The young people need to have the inherent worth of their minds and their ideas validated. The addition of academic skill is a tactical decision: to be able to operate fully in a system that requires academic proficiency.

> "Just because YAP treats us as if we were already educated, we can't kid ourselves. We need that education. We can't stay at YAP all our lives. We have to face the rest of the world where they don't respect people just because they're human."
>
> - German Tejeda, at age 22.

HELPING LEADERS GROW OUT OF PERSONAL HANG-UPS

Unfortunately, just because a young person takes initiative, is an eloquent spokesperson, cares deeply about improving the world, throws herself into the work, and is even relatively reliable or honorable does not mean that she has all the qualities of a good leader.

Most human beings have some lousy habits and deeply ingrained attitudes which work against their being good leaders. Young people raised in adversity, often in poverty, often subject to abuse and deprivation of various forms, do not usually come out perfectly confident, loving, fair, trustworthy, and unselfish.

Further, it is very difficult for leaders to please their constituency. Most people have had very bad experiences with leaders who are in it for themselves, for power, for advantage, for prestige, for money, for position. There is a tendency to pull down from leadership positions anybody who appears the least bit arrogant, or who is not warmly friendly to everybody, or who gets a lot of attention and obviously enjoys it.

Handling the lousy habits of the upcoming leader, on the one hand, and the patterns of rejection by the members, on the other, can be a real challenge.

To complicate things further, in a program employing adult staff, the standards of leadership held by the adults can be high, and the adults sometimes impose on the young people an expectation that they measure all the way up before being considered to be leaders.

At Youth Action Program over the years we have frequently had talented and outstanding young people who were emerging as leaders but who also possessed at least one difficult negative pattern: abuse of drugs or alcohol, compulsive thievery, a tendency to bully or intimidate others, irresponsibility, a tendency toward being easily fooled or bamboozled by others, a drive to "get over" by lying, a compulsion to control everything, a self-destructive tendency to fail at school, a relentless urge to create in-groups and cliques that divide the group, or some other specific pattern of behavior that undermines the person's own success and certainly her ability to lead effectively.

Handling these patterns is much harder than handling the initial timidity that the young people bring. Simple respect, opportunity to have information and input, and emotional support can release the initiative and intelligence of young people.

But how to confront and correct negative and compulsive patterns is much harder.

Sometimes they can't be corrected in the context of the youth organization. But when discovered, if a pattern is serious, the individual can't be allowed to continue leading until some correction is made.

Some Examples

Change is often possible if the program staff will engage in the struggle. For example, a young woman was insulting staff members by being bossy and cursing. She was told by the person closest to her that she would be suspended from the governing committee for a month, during which time no incidents of disrespect could occur if she wanted to regain her position on the committee. She became upset, crying and yelling, but she continued to talk through and think through the issues. She returned to the committee after a month with changed behavior. This was possible only because the person administering this judgment cared very deeply about her and respected her contribution.

In another case, a young man who had been well beloved by his peers and a constant leader, developed an increasingly obvious case of alcohol abuse. He finally wound up in a fist fight with another young man. The young people's committee removed him from his leadership role and required that he go for counseling for his alcohol addiction. This decision was complicated by the fact that his sister and his cousin were on the committee. He did go for the counseling, but he also pulled out for two or three years, before coming back as an active friend of the program and visible person in the community. He had faced the alcohol addiction and apparently overcome it.

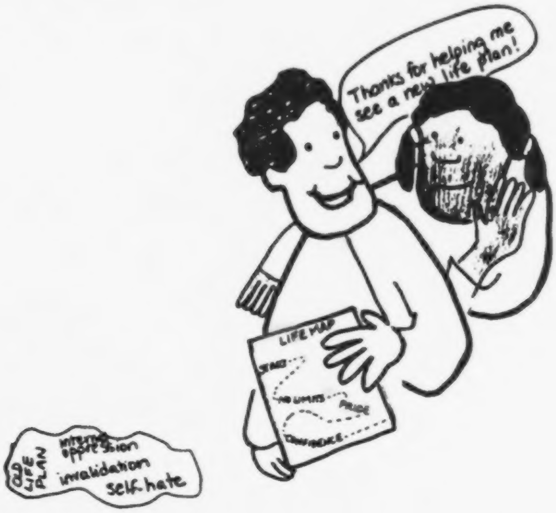
One young man was found to have stolen valuable items from the home of a staff person with whom he had lived for nine months. He was taken aside and told that this issue would be raised in the governing committee for discussion. He dropped out of leadership. We don't know if he stopped stealing. He joined the army.

One young man had a judgmental attitude toward other people. Not understood by the others was the fact that he judged himself equally harshly, and was extremely self-deprecatory. But they thought he was arrogant and cold, and resented any leadership role he took. In reality, he felt isolated and lonely. His mentor engaged him in long-term counseling, over several years, to help him become more relaxed and warm in his contacts with others and more accepting of himself.

Life-Planning Program

Never have we seen a potential leader coming forth who did not need real attention to her development and life plan. Even those who did not have negative patterns had severe life problems with which they needed help: medical problems, family problems, school problems, housing problems, relationship problems. Any or all of these turned out to be lurking under the surface.

As a result, we instituted a program of "life-planning" for our leaders. We hired a counselor whose entire role is devoted to helping the leaders take responsibility for their own lives, not allowing them to lay a coating of pride through leadership on top of a weak foundation. The life-planning counselor sets up tuturing, helps people get jobs, acts as an advocate with the school, provides personal counseling, and generally helps each leader lay out and attain objectives for her own life.



UNDERLYING DOUBTS

Self-Deprecation

Young people who have been raised in poverty and who belong to an oppressed minority usually have a deeply internalized pattern of harsh self-deprecation. Even after they have successfully handled one leadership position after another, when you scratch the surface of newfound confidence, you often find a deep conviction that they can only go so far, they are only fit for the lower end of things, that they will never get out of poverty, and that they don't deserve to do better than the rest of their family.

Fear

This feeling is often quite powerful. Rising above one's family, or one's people, or above one's previous expectations, is very scary. There is a guilt, and a vague terror of being attacked or of falling all the way down in humiliation. Sometimes people's response to this is to coat their insecurity with a layer of pretense, of three-piece suits and a tone of professionalism. Sometimes their response is to get drunk and wreck their chances. Sometimes their response is to direct hostility at the people who have helped them. Various self-destructive types of behavior can be driven by the fear and confusion caused by unexpected and distrusted success.

Risk of Being Pulled Down

Further, there is a real risk of being attacked. One of the results of oppression seems to be that people pull each other down, convinced that nobody can succeed. The unconscious thinking seems to go something like this: "If I can't, why should he? He's no better than I am, so let me shoot him down so he stays down here with me. Since I know I am locked into this lower position and I can't move, I can't stand to see anybody else succeed. Besides, he doesn't deserve it either."

Peer Selection

This dynamic is one reason why it is important for young leaders to be selected by their peers, through a process of secret ballots. Being elected is a fine contradiction to the feeling that you will be attacked if you rise above the group in any visible way. When the group actually chooses you, it helps. It also assures the group that you have been legitimately chosen.

Personal Counseling

The underlying fear and insecurity of our strongest members often needs to be addressed in personal counseling. It's not enough to see apparent success and say everything is fine with that person. Success can trigger upsetting feelings that need to be vented and discussed and understood, just as failure and disappointment can.

Depression From External Threat

Parallel to the personal fear of success and individual self-deprecation, there lies the profound fear that the outside world, the powers that be, the insanity and illogic of the world as it is, will not allow your people to reclaim their dignity or yourself to succeed or your leaders to survive. The murders of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, and John F. Kennedy have had a devastating effect on succeeding generations. When real leadership is the issue, the young people always say, "What's the point. If we did anything really great we'd just be killed." An underlying depression, cynicism, and powerlessness is the result.

Open Discussion

Both the internal unrecognized fears of success and the underlying depression about the futility of it all must be raised for discussion. The adult guide needs to verbalize these issues, or raise questions which will allow the feelings to be articulated in the group. It is useful simply to warn people that success is scary, that it may make people feel guilty, or scared of being attacked, or scared of failing, or scared of letting people down, or unworthy. Asking if anybody has ever felt this way may open the floodgates.

It is similarly useful to discuss hopelessness. Deep discussion can be stimulated by posing a simple question like this to the group: "Is it possible to eliminate racism (or poverty, or war, or injustice, or drugs, or child abuse...); if not, why not; and if so, how can it be done?" This is the kind of question that requires giving each member of the group an equal number of minutes to respond, because everybody has important and lengthy things to say.

"It's sad that we, as Spanish and Black children, put ourselves down. But it's not our fault. It's a reflection of how society operates. It can be changed. We are already involved in changing it, because we understand it, and we care. That's why I want to join with everybody to build a community based on love! Love is a strong force, the force that shall dominate the world if it is liberated."

- Johnny Rivera, at age 19.

Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10029
(212) 860-8170

Element Seven

ORGANIZING TO HAVE IMPACT ON THE WORLD

A) COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

- Role of the Adult Organizer
- Overview of the Implementation Process for Community Improvement Projects

B) POLITICAL ACTION

- Some Basic Principles for Organizing Political Action
- A Training Session for Organizing Political Action
- Developing a Position Paper
- Organizing a Rally
- A Successful Campaign for Youth Employment

A) COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

ROLE OF THE ADULT ORGANIZER

Some youth-serving agencies and schools will limit themselves to leadership development within their on-going programs. Others may add a whole component of youth-run community improvement projects on the model of Youth Action Program, aiming to make tangible, visible, and significant contributions to the community. Nothing builds pride and skill as much as success at these projects.

Role of the Adult Organizers

Success depends on the adult organizer's being able to play an extraordinary combination of roles, each of them requiring skill and delicacy. The four major tasks are these: organizing the teenagers, organizing community involvement, drawing in both human and material resources, and smoothing the path through any institutional or political obstacles that may arise.

In more detail, each of these tasks involves the following:

I) Organizing the Young People

A) Validating ideas and abilities

This is the first and most basic process. The organizer must genuinely respect the ideas and abilities of the teenagers, and must make this constantly clear. In meetings, his role is to draw out the ideas of every member of the group, take them utterly seriously, compliment them, and let the young people make the decisions themselves. In action, his role is to stand back, let the young people do the work and make the decisions, but feed in essential information as needed so they can make informed decisions.

This is not easy for most adults. Most adults, as we know, fall into authority roles without even noticing it. They consider their opinions and mode of operating to be automatically superior to those of teenagers. The organizer must be an exception to this pattern. Indicative of this difference is the comment of one 13-year-old, when a YAP organizer asked her group if she could invite any other adults to their meetings. "Yes," said Wanda. "If they think like you."

B) Providing a "Yes!"

Children and teenagers are filled with ideas for constructive action. Usually these ideas are blocked by adults or institutions which have prohibitive rules, or other plans, or no time, or little imagination, or no trust in the young people's abilities.

The organizer's role, within reason, is to say, "Yes! That's a good idea, I know some ways to help you, I'll be there with you, I don't see why we can't make that dream come true. . . it'll take a lot of work, but Yes!"

C) Giving information

The young people will need to know how to do things, where to get help, what problems could arise. Some of this information will be technical (how to buy a building from the City), and some human (how adults are likely to view the situation), some political (who is likely to object and how to handle it).

The organizer's role is critical here. While the teenagers often have excellent judgment, they usually lack adequate information on which to make a judgment.

D) Supporting positive attitudes and modes of working

The young people generally start out with a real conglomeration of different attitudes. They have high ideals, high standards of justice, love, and mercy -

and they usually have at least a few lousy habits of insulting each other, being unreliable, telling self-protective lies, grabbing first come first served, competing for status, changing their minds according to their moods, getting high.

The organizer's role is to support their high standards and gently but firmly push against the old habits. Once the organizer puts out a just concept, we find it echoed again and again by the young people. For example, when the organizer says, "In this group we're trying to do something serious and we're not going to put each other down in any way, because that messes things up and makes people feel bad; even if they've learned to cover it up, it still hurts their feelings. We don't want people getting hurt in this group." Then the idea - "no snapping on each other" - is heard in many situations re-stated by the teenagers.

As the young people take themselves more and more seriously, and have increasing power to make important decisions, their high ideals begin to take over. The organizer can make all the difference in this, not by attacking the bad habits, but simply by pointing out, when the right moment comes, how these habits interfere with the goals of the teenagers' project.

Another example of this process, in combination with the process of giving information, occurred at the end of one group's first day cleaning their building. They had worked hard and fast and were very proud. The organizer advised them that for this project to develop full community support, the teenagers had to be sure that only "good vibes" came out of their building - no pot smoking, no cursing, no sitting dangerously in the windows, no being there during school hours, no bottle-breaking, no loud arguments - nothing to make the neighbors say, "Oh, oh, there's trouble."

All the young people accepted the truth of the advice. In the midst of their huge burst of constructive energy, this advice didn't elicit so much as a groan. Everyone nodded agreement, and the idea was immediately echoed by group memebers with each other.

Specific attitudes which the organizer will need to support throughout are these:

- complete respect for each other; really listening to each other's ideas and feelings without teasing or insults;

- consensual decision-making, after everyone's opinion has been heard. The tendency for the strongest voice to call the shots has to be replaced by democratic processes;

- a non-judgmental attitude toward people in the community. The tendency to divide and judge, exclude and defend, has to be replaced by a welcoming, open respect.

All of these increase the cohesion of the group by making it safer to be oneself and express one's opinions. In addition, when the young people work in this way, they will gain great respect from the neighborhood adults.

E) Persisting through disappointments

Sometimes the young people don't show up, or do what they promised. The organizer can't suddenly turn into an angry adult who's been imposed upon. This happens too often, and is totally counter-productive. Caring explanation about the results of being unreliable can help, but not angry reactions.

The adult has to go where the teenagers are, on the block and in the hallways, and persist in welcoming them. This may be the hardest part. It's like riding a roller coaster. The project is zooming forward as it catches the energy and imagination of the young people, and then it collapses. Nobody's there, nobody's interested. Then the organizer has to hang in there, caring and teaching and believing in the teenagers' ability to bounce back and solve the problem.

F) Building in education and leadership skills

The projects provide excellent educational opportunities. Each will be different, but all will involve:

1) Some project-specific technical skills, such as operating CB radios, or repairing the plumbing.

2) General understanding of government processes.

3) Opportunities to read about the subject.

4) Specific leadership skills, such as taking

minutes, planning agendas, speaking, making community contacts, writing news reports, making leaflets, reviewing proposals, fund-raising.

The organizer's role is to maximize these opportunities, and, where appropriate, obtain school credit for what the teenagers are learning.

G) Helping with personal problems

All of the teenagers have their own problems. Sooner or later they begin to share them. The organizer's role is to listen well and help in any possible way.

II) Organizing Community Support

A) Contacting parents

Parents will need to be sure the organizer is a relible and caring person. Once sure, they will be extremely supportive. Parents of teenagers are often at their wits' end and welcome any good program.

Juggling the parents' concerns with respect for the growing independence of the young people is an art. The parents may try to make the oganizer into an authority-ally. This will have to be resisted, although the organizer must respect the parents' concerns and wishes, and sometimes act as a mediator between parents and teenagers.

Other parents may want to join directly in the project. This is usually not workable, because the adult-child relationships is one that the teenager doesn't want continued in this project. Parents should be encouraged to give indirect support rather than direct, except in those few cases where teenagers choose to involve their parents.

B) Creating an adult support committee

Each project may have an adult support committee of adults willing to do down-to-earth chores in cooperation with the youth. Fund-raising, handling city bureaucracies, borrowing equipment, supervising activities when necessary, driving cars. - all the things which adults can do and teenagers can't.

This committee is not to be a decision-making group nor a supervisory group. However, its opinions about the project will naturally be important to the youth and the organizer and will be an indication of what is required to retain community support.

The young people should always be invited to the meetings of the support committee. This will ensure that the young people know directly how much support they are getting, and what is on the committee members' minds. It will prevent the adults from talking about the teenagers in their absence. Any concerns the adults have can be discussed directly with the young people.

There need to be regular meetings between the entire youth group and the support committee.

The organizer's role is to seek out sympathetic and competent adults for this committee, guide their contribution, and keep in close touch with them.

C) Reaching out to build general community support

Some of this can best be done by the youth themselves and some by the support committee. The organizer's role is to make sure it's done and fill in the gap.

The youth ought to contact all the residents in the immediate neighborhood of their project. They can knock on all the apartment doors to explain their project, offer their services as appropriate, and invite participation. This is a crucial part of the program, because it will establish the initial visibility and tone of young people in action. It will lay the groundwork for broader community involvement.

The adult support committee ought to reach out to whoever in the larger community would have an interest in the particular project.

III) Drawing in Both Human and Material Resources

Presumably any significant project will require more resources than the youth group and the organizer have at the outset. The organizer's role is to identify the needs and locate the resources, involving the young people and the adult supporters as appropriate. Resouces that are generally needed are these:

A) Job slots for the young people undertaking significant time commitments.

B) Funds for equipment and materials.

C) Technical assistance and general consulting from experts in the field of the particular projects.

D) Volunteers to contribute to the work itself, both from within and from outside the community.

E) On-going funding for any major project undertaken.

IV) Smoothing the Path Through Institutional and Political Obstacles

A) Getting through city bureaucracies

Any project of any significance takes considerable negotiating skill and administrative perseverance. While the young people and supporting adults will participate in this, the organizer will provide the essential skill and experience.

B) Maneuvering through potential political obstacles

Most communities have a thick layer of political organization and competition. Resources and decision-making roles are controlled by ambitious competing groups. For the youth projects to thrive, they will need to stay on good terms with everyone without slipping into anyone's pocket. The organizer's role will be to steer this process delicately.

C) Smoothing the way in local organizations

As the youth projects relate to local institutions - schools, police departments, housing authorities, etc. - they will run into snags requiring adult intervention. Once again, this will be part of the organizer's role.

OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

The implementation process for most community improvement projects can be described in phases as follows:

Phase 1. Locating or organizing a viable group

(one to two months)

This phase will involve systematic outreach:

A) Making informal contact with teenagers through their schools, centers, churches, street life, and sports. In most cases, this will involve gaining an invitation from an adult supervisor and then working with these groups long enough to make friends with a number of the teenagers. Once these friendships are made, the organizer can invite individuals and their friends to an activity or gathering or meeting, in order to meet possible friendship groups. It is more efficient to work with existing friendship groups, because they have already chosen each other.

B) Making contact with adults who have already formed a supportive relationship with a group of teenagers to whom they could introduce the organizer. These adults are found by asking who in the neighborhood might have this kind of relationship, and seeking out all of these people.

C) Putting out the word in the community that if a group of young people approaches the program they can obtain an adult advisor to help them carry out a project.

D) Beginning meetings with promising groups, until one emerges as viable.

The completion of this phase will be marked by the organizer and the group having completed two or three successful meetings to discuss a project, and having decided to go forward together.

All of the contacts made in this phase will contribute to the organizing of adult involvement. Getting to know adult supervisors in their institutional settings will lay the goundwork for on-going cooperation, and meeting adults throughout the community who are known for their good relationships with teenagers will create the basis for a very solid adult network.

Phase 2. Defining the group and project (one-two months)

During this phase, the teenagers' group will:

A) Define the nature of the project.

B) Define who is firmly a member of the group. This is not necessarily a smooth process. People may drop in and out, revealing a stable core group willing to go ahead regardless of who comes and goes.

C) Establish some ground rules regarding what they expect from each other and from the organizers.

During this phase, the organizer will:

A) Contact parents.

B) Make contacts with potential members of the adult support committee, and arrange a meeting between these adults and the young people.

C) Do basic research on the feasibility of the project.

The completion of this phase will be marked by the teenagers' being confident enough to knock on neighbors' doors to explain their project. Four to eight weeks is an optimal length of time for this phase. More than that will cause the young people to drop away, saying "Ain't nothin' happening."

Phase 3. Launching the actual project (one-two months)

This is the exciting stage when the action begins. Everything picks up speed, everyone sees that something is happening. The young people all being patrolling with their CB radios, or begin cleaning the building they are to renovate, or delivering home-cooked meals to the senior citizens, or have their first block party, or begin painting the hallways with beautiful murals, etc. This stage is meant to be dramatic, replete with picture-taking and approving adults and neighbors.

During this phase, the following can be expected to occur:

A) A sudden increase in the membership of the group, causing realization of the need to define the group in a new way. For example, in the building project, the group had to decide that no one could work regularly on the building who didn't come to meetings, and no one could come to meetings who didn't work. This stabilized the group.

B) A realization of the need for more guidelines and some supervisory structure to channel the sudden flow of energy.

C) Some hard meetings working out disagreements and standards for each other.

During this phase, the following should be arranged by the organizer:

A) The beginning of adult fundraising in support of the project. This should be begun while the excitement is high.

B) A meeting of all the adults who have come forth to support the youth.

C) Visits by the young people to others in neighboring communities who have tried similar projects. This is to give them a sense of the importance of their undertaking and to overcome the isolation of their own community.

Phase 4. Settling into work (on-going)

During this phase, which may go on for years, doubts and long-range difficulties will appear. When the first excitement subsides, the group may contract again. Some people may drop out, others drift. People may look back with longing to the exciting beginning and wonder what they're really in this for. This phase will test everybody's stamina and imagination.

During this phase, the following work will have to be done:

A) Methods of reflection and evaluation of the group process and the work being done will have to be deeply rooted in the friendship group. Regular meetings, on-going adjustment of problems, honest communication, tough standards, mutual support: these will have to be established.

B) The same will have to be true of the Adult Support Committee.

C) A steady flow of resources, as appropriate, will have to be established, including, very likely, funds for additional staff.

D) Steady communication with the neighborhood must be maintained.

During this phase, the following kinds of events should help maintain enthusiasm.

A) Publicity

B) The steady generation of more ideas. That is, while it is important to complete initial goals, it is also important to continue responding to people's brilliant ideas and ambitions about what could come next. Balancing response to new possibilities with responsibility for jobs already undertaken will be necessary.

C) Joyful events, fundraising parties, trips together for fun, unrelated to the task but deepening relationships.

D) Clever balancing of arduous with delightful tasks. For example, in one building project, it made sense to plant a garden before putting in the plumbing.

E) Celebration of the completion of different stages of the task. This might mean bringing parents to see the results, or having a community meeting, or planning a trip at the completion of a large task.

F) Bringing visitors from outside the neighborhood to see the project and be impressed.

G) Involving college students and others who will open new possibilities for teenagers.

Above is a generic type of description which we hope will be helpful. The particulars of each community improvement project are infinitely diverse!

DAILY NEWS

35¢ NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER® Wednesday, January 21, 1987

Manhattan Wednesday, January 21, 1987

Flats for the homeless

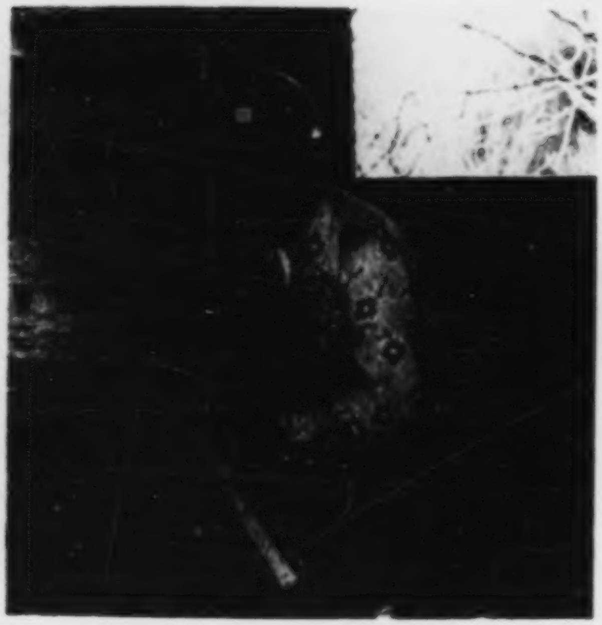
By JOHN SHEILS

A city-owned building in East Harlem that was rehabilitated by 45 unemployed local youths has been completed and is now housing 13 homeless families.

A crew from "Youth Action Homes 1985" rehabilitates a city-owned abandoned building in East Harlem

THE NEW YORK TIMES,

Youths Restore Building And Rebuild Own Pride



Daily News,

In East Harlem, the hard work pays off

B) ORGANIZING POLITICAL ACTION

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR ORGANIZING POLITICAL ACTION

Injustice and bigotry make people mad. What to do with rage is a big question. Some people believe in organizing movements based on justifiable rage, to challenge the status quo. Some organizers try to identify the opposition and stir up anger directed at them in order to get the movement going and to force the people with power to take notice.

Vision and Unity

Organizing at the Youth Action Program is based on the opposite approach. Instead of stirring up rage we have tried to stir up hope, vision, unity, confidence, power, cooperation, responsibility, love, and determination. While underlying rage may fuel some of this, we have reached not for the anger, which has a tendency to burn out its owner and create retaliatory anger in its target. Instead, we reach for a unifying vision of a society in which all people are treated with respect and have equal access to opportunity.

Riots and Rage

Although riots and rage do trigger some political response, it is usually short-lived because it is based on fear. When the threat is removed, the gains are withdrawn. Gains based on persuasion, on real changes in attitudes, on moral power, seem to last longer.

We believe that threats generate counter-reactions; violence generates violence; hate generates hate; attacks generate resistance and counter-attack.

Propose, Don't Protest

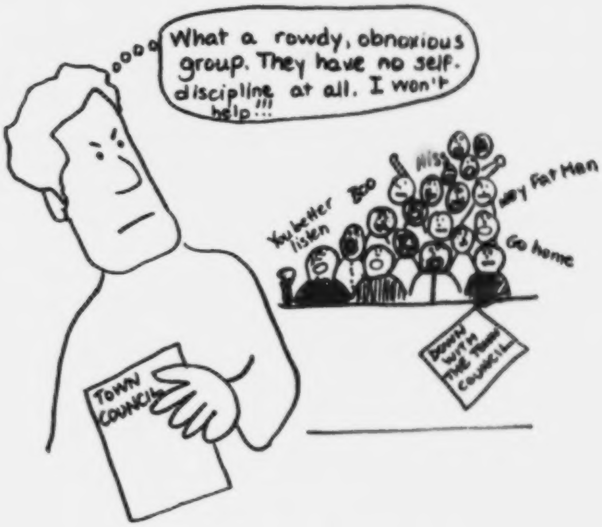
Thus when we set out to organize something designed to change some injustice, we don't protest, we propose. We don't attack, we persuade. We never organize based on fear and anger, but rather on love and vision. Nonetheless, we know it is necessary to go all the way to generate the impact, the power, the moral and political and numerical force, that can win a point.

Force of Numbers

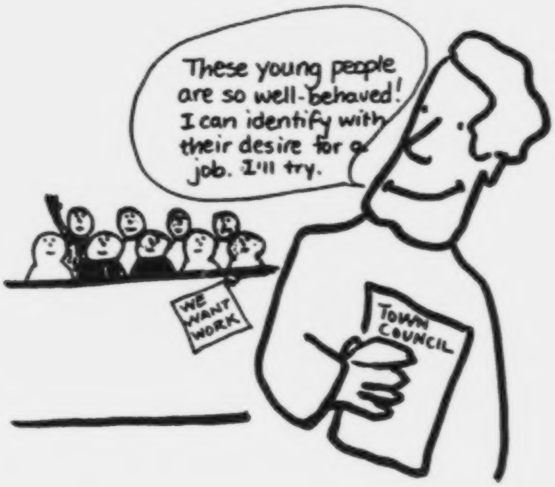
The force of numbers should not be underestimated. A large constituency with a respectful attitude can develop clout very rapidly.

Image and Organization

Image is important. For example, when we were organizing to appear at the City Council and call for jobs for young people, our members practiced every Wednesday night for three months. The young people practiced not only public speaking, but public image.


What a rowdy, obnoxious group. They have no self-discipline at all. I won't help!!!
You better listen
Boo
Hiss
Hey Fat Man
Go home
DOWN WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL
TOWN COUNCIL

They practiced walking in an organized way, in single file, filling up every successive seat in a row rather than flowing into the Council in an undisciplined way. They practiced standing in unison and clapping together at the close of every speech of one of our supporters. They practiced sitting down together, as one. They wore no hats and chewed no gum. They knew that this degree of self-discipline, implying no threat but demonstrating planning and internal unity, would have an impact. It did. We knew that the larger the number of people we could organize, the greater the impact. We knew that the more respectful the group, given how scared the White society is of large numbers of Black and Latin young people, the greater the power of the group, because they would inspire respect, trigger surprise, and, in fact, generate gratitude. (A significant part of the White society is grateful when large numbers of Black and Latin people with a right to be mad are reaching for alliances instead of attacking.) We knew they would counteract the prejudices against them, and this would generate a receptivity to their proposals for job training.


These young people are so well-behaved! I can identify with their desire for a job. I'll try.
WE WANT WORK
TOWN COUNCIL

The Force of Love

This worked, and it always works, to show respect for the opposition, appreciation for whatever gains are made, and unity within the ranks based on shared vision and commitment to a better world. People respond to integrity, hard work, creative ideas, and love. To overcome the opposition it is not necessary or useful to threaten people; to mobilize support it is not necessary to promise people personal gain. Hostility and selfishness as tools for organizing undermine the humanity of the movement and inculcate negative values in its members. The question before us as we organize is always how can we maximize the force of love.

A TRAINING SESSION FOR ORGANIZING AN ACTION CAMPAIGN

Program, Unity, Alliances, Action

If a group wants to organize other people to make some change in society, there are four essential steps. First, the group must develop its Program: that is, it must decide what its particular goals are. Second, it must get Unity within itself and with people in similar situations in support of the program. Third, it must reach out and develop Alliances with other groups which could reasonably be expected to support the same goals. And, fourth, it must carry out some determined Action to achieve the goal, to win support for the program and get it implemented.

The importance of Program, Unity, Alliances, and Action as a sequence of steps is easily taught. Below is a training sequence that can be used with young people for this purpose.

Outline of Training Sequence:

1) Define the four-step approach, putting the four steps on the chart or the blackboard and explaining the meaning of each.

2) Ask the group of young people what is needed by all young people growing up in order for them to become their fullest and best selves. The group will put forth a list something like this: love, opportunity to learn, food and shelter, friends who are a good influence, a beautiful environment, a job or money, good health, fun things to do, and something to believe in. Put it on a wall chart.

3) Ask for a show of hands to indicate which of these things are most important, if they had to choose. Let people vote with two hands for the three things they consider most important. They can vote with one hand for the others.

4) After a little discussion about the three items with the most votes, pick one about which to develop a "Program."

5) If the group is more than 12 people, divide into groups of no more than 8 people, with facilitators in each, to develop a program to obtain the chosen item. Ask them what changes or new programs in the community, or in the institutions of society, or in society as a whole, would provide young people with the item.

For example, if they choose love as most important, which they often do, and you decide to tackle this intangible one, you will get answers like this: have birth control available so unwanted and unloved children aren't born by mistake; have good jobs for parents so they feel good and can love their children; have support groups for parents and for teachers, so they can deal with their problems and not take them out on the children; have counseling programs for people who abuse their children; have big brother and big sister programs; have programs like Youth Action Program replicated all over the country.

6) Once you have an array of proposals to foster love, the small groups discuss which of these proposals would be possible to achieve. Then the group chooses the most important of the attainable ones as the central elements in their program.

7) Small groups report back to the large group, sharing all their program ideas and their central items. The large group selects one or more that are extremely important and attainable.

8) The group brainstorms all the groups and constituencies which would agree with the program. A list of potential allies is produced.

9) The group again brainstorms a method for achieving the program. The ACTION is designed. For example, if they have chosen the replication of YAP as their most direct and achievable goal, they probably have a fundraising, public relations, and training strategy. If they have chosen good jobs for parents as their most important goal, they probably have a massive organizing and lobbying strategy that aims to create a government jobs program and a private sector training program.

10) The overall steps are reviewed again: PROGRAM, UNITY, ALLIANCES, ACTION, this time reviewing the example in each category, and making the point that this is what has to be done whenever people set out to improve the world: design their program, achieve internal unity, reach out for alliances, and take the appropriate action to persuade the people with power to provide the resources.

DEVELOPING A POSITION PAPER

At an early stage in any organizing campaign, a position paper must be developed which puts forth an analysis of the problem and a proposal for solving or ameliorating the problem.

Under some circumstances enough discussion and observation will have occurred so that the organizer can sit down when the time comes and simply write a draft position paper to be reviewed by the constituency.

Eliciting Analysis and Proposals:

If you are starting from scratch, there is no better way to develop an accurate position on an issue than to consult widely with large numbers of people affected by and knowledgeable about the issue. Even if you have good ideas already, verifying and refining them through this process will give them greater legitimacy and accuracy. Once the consultation is done, a position paper can be written that will go to the heart of the matter.

Issues affecting youth should be approached the same way: through broad discussion with large numbers of young people.

When there is no young person skilled enough, an experienced adult has to lead the discussions and write the paper, based on the ideas of the young people. The procedure is straightforward.

First, the adult should meet with about a dozen groups of young people and ask them the causes and the possible solutions to the problem under discussion. If the issue is, for example, violence in the schools, they will come up with an array of causes that cover everything: boring classes, too little communication between different ethnic groups, too little youth involvement in the running of the school, drugs, anger about the world that teenagers take out on each other, gangs, not enough love and attention from adults, not enough recreational activities to bring people closer together, racism, etc. They will make complementary proposals for improvement.

Writing a Draft Position Paper:

After enough discussions, certain patterns of perception will appear. Primary causes and best-liked solutions will begin to surface. Categories of causes and solutions will materialize. The adult can then organize the material into a paper which persuasively communicates the collective thinking of all the young people. If there is a young person who can help write it, all the better.

Feedback, Editing, and Final Adoption:

Once the paper is done, the young people who contributed their thinking should be reconvened to read and respond to it. They will have additions and adjustments to make.

The paper should be edited as suggested, and then if the group is easily accessible, redistributed for their final review and approval. At this point it becomes the position paper of the organization, and can be used in public presentations.

Summary:

The principle of collecting and organizing the best thinking from a large number of people, and then feeding it back to them in an organized form for their agreement is one which can be used in every context. It is the means of developing unity around a program which crystalizes the most brilliant ideas of the constituency into a form they can rally around. This is a key role of good leadership. It is worth the time it takes.

WHAT WE CAN'T
DO ALONE
WE CAN DO
TOGETHER
Strength in Unity!

ORGANIZING A RALLY

Every now and then a group needs to organize a rally, vigil, or demonstration. This is a simple process, but it takes clarity about what needs to be done and who is in charge of each element.

For success, there must be an overall organizer who is extremely thorough, well-organized, attentive to detail, and able to follow through on every task which has been delegated. This person is likely to be one of the most skilled adults. She should have one or more assistants who are young people getting training in the role of over-all organizer.

The organizing group should together identify every area of work which needs to be done, making a big list:

I) COALITION BUILDING

    A) Written Statement
    B) Co-sponsors
    C) Decision-Making Process

II) OUTREACH

    A) Posters
    B) By Mail
    C) By Telephone
    D) Buttons
    E) Special Invitations
    F) Fliers

III) PRESS

    A) Press release
    B) Press packet
    C) Press telephoning
    D) Press handling at event

IV) PROGRAM

- A) Master of Ceremonies
- B) Speeches
- C) Entertainment
- D) Timing and Order of Events

V) LOGISTICS

- A) Sound system
- B) Platform
- C) Guides
- D) Liaison with police

VI) SPECIAL EFFECTS

- A) Balloons
- B) Signs
- C) Banners
- D) Other

VII) DOCUMENTATION

- A) Photographs
- B) Videotaping

The group may, of course, think of others. The key thing is to have one person clearly in charge of each element, and one person in charge of the overall coordination, making sure that everyone is absolutely clear on her assignment and role. Follow-up meetings need to occur, in which each person reports on progress.

There is a persistent tendency for groups to be vague about who is in charge, and to assign tasks to pairs or to groups. A certain percentage invariably falls between the cracks and the event is only partially successful. The principle of individual responsibility is important.

A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

As an encouraging case study, we have included the following description of a highly successful organizing campaign.

In 1984 and 1985, in a thrilling campaign initiated by young people at Youth Action Program, 120 agencies got together in New York City, formed a Coalition called the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars, and persuaded the City government to commit 14.75 million dollars each year to funding an array of model youth employment programs serving over 6,000 young people each year. At the outset, City government had no interest in doing this, and was, in fact, quite resistant.

In this chapter, we will not elaborate on WHAT we instituted, even though it's interesting. Instead, the focus is on HOW we did it.

There were eight broad aspects essential to our work. Listed simply, they were as follows:

1) BUILDING A REPUTATION OVER TIME

2) BUILDING A BROAD MEMBERSHIP CONSTITUENCY

3) DESIGNING OUR PROPOSED MODELS CAREFULLY ON PAPER AFTER HAVING PROVEN THEM WORKABLE IN PRACTICE

4) NEGOTIATING FOR AGREEMENT WITH CITY BUREAUCRATS

5) LOBBYING AND TESTIFYING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

6) INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY AND PREPARING THEM TO TAKE A FRONT ROLE IN PUBLIC SPEAKING.

7) NEGOTIATING WITH AND BUILDING UNITY WITH OTHER ADVOCACY GROUPS WHO HAD DOMINATED THE TERRITORY BEFORE US.

8) MAINTAINING AND MONITORING THE PROGRAM.

Each of these eight fronts was essential to our success. Failure on any of them could have spelled failure for the effort. The fact that we did thorough, energetic, visible, sensitive, and effective work on each front is one reason we succeeded. The other reason is that the principles guiding our work were on target.

The two over-riding principles we followed were these:

1) We did not organize from anger or self-interest. We did not stir up people's feelings of victimization nor urge them to demand redress. Rather, we generated a sense of hope and organized from people's caring and their vision of how much better things could be. Our mode is not to attack and blame anybody for unsolved problems, but to offer solutions and seek both human and material resources to reach them. We assume power rather than bemoan powerlessness.

Two results of organizing from love rather than anger were that we attracted very responsible people to join us, and we didn't make any enemies in city government. In less than two years, we created a complete consensus in city government, with minimal help from the media, overcoming initial reluctance from the Mayor and the relevant commissioners, all of whom eventually became active supporters of the program.

Few of the agencies involved ever expected to be funded. We promised our members nothing and did not attempt in any way to influence funding decisions of the City once a funding stream was created. People were involved for the public interest, not for their own agencies' interests.

2) The second over-riding principle is that we made a decision to succeed. We were not interested in just going through the motions or trying hard. We went all the way with each step, making for a head of steam that blew all obstacles right out of the way.

We did not, by the way, spend a lot of money. About $25,000 a year is what it cost us to pull this off. We simply worked very hard and people donated their time.

Following is a description of what we did on each of the eight organizing fronts.

1) BUILDING A REPUTATION OVER TIME

The Youth Action Program built a base over a period of five years, demonstrating the effectiveness of the model we wanted institutionalized, and establishing ourselves as a trusted member of the field of youth employment and youth services programs. We participated in about 12 consortia and coalitions, always building cooperative relationships with other groups. Before we started the Coalition, we had a good reputation as a supporter of other people's cooperative efforts, and we had proven that the model we proposed was workable. As a result, when we proposed a new coalition, four other groups with equally good reputations agreed to co-sponsor it. Then other groups all over the City signed on with eagerness. Reputation is all-important.

2) BUILDING A BROAD MEMBERSHIP CONSTITUENCY

We wrote a simple two page statement of purpose, drafted and re-drafted to be understandable and easy to read for the young people. This two page double-spaced document turned out to be most useful in expanding our agency membership.

We sent a covering letter with this statement of purpose to all the youth, housing, and homeless programs in the City, inviting them to join the Coalition for Ten Million Dollars. (We didn't change our name to the Coalition for Twenty Million Dollars until the second year.) It cost nothing to join the Coalition.

Then we made presentations systematically at every gathering of agencies throughout the City. Figuring the most efficient way to reach the broadest number of agencies was not to go one by one but to go coalition by coalition, group by group, network by network, we made presentations at every such gathering, asking for members.

Within three months we had seventy member agencies.

We held several meetings, which were each well organized, pleasant, open, and purposeful. People who came to our meetings all had a chance to speak. They left feeling this was a good group.

We didn't hold many meetings, because people are very busy. Initial meetings to firm up our proposal to the city, a meeting to plan the budget campaign, a meeting to edit our expanded proposal, a meeting to prepare for the public hearings, and Borough-level organizing meetings to reach out were about all we needed, each year. We did not build a bureaucracy. We had meetings only when we needed them.

The second year we did another outreach campaign, and grew to 120 agencies, ten of which were themselves coalitions, so by the end of the second year we represented over 600 agencies.

The momentum with which we expanded was critical both to persuading our elected officials and to persuading existing advocacy groups that there was broad-based support for our ideas and that we were a force to be reckoned with.

During this period we hired temporary staff to make phone calls, keep records, send mailings, and handle the tremendous amount of careful communication that had to go on to develop membership this quickly, and, further, to mobilize the membership for lobbying.

Ongoing communication with our membership was critical, so we put out a BULLETIN every two or three weeks during the heat of the budget period every spring, and put out a bulletin every two or four months during the rest of the year.

3) DESIGNING OUR PROPOSED MODELS CAREFULLY ON PAPER

We wrote a highly professional, and inspirational proposal to the City government, which gave the rationale, the need, the detailed description of the programs and the budgets for each. It was about 15 pages long. This was our talking paper. It was carefully written and edited. We sent a draft out to all our members for their review, and invited them to an open meeting to give feedback on the document. The document was then revised and sent out again. Before we presented it to officials we had full constituency support for it.

The document helped establish that we were not only good organizers, but we were professionally competent. Each year we have written such a proposal detailing proposed expansion and enhancement of the programs.

4) NEGOTIATING WITH CITY BUREAUCRATS.

We were proposing that the City employ and train young people in housing rehabilitation. At the outset they did not want to do this. The Department of Housing said young people couldn't do it; they said young people couldn't keep to the schedules or produce quality work, and they would just be a nuisance. The Department of Employment didn't want to do it either. They said they didn't know anything about housing; it wasn't in their province and it would just be a nuisance. Everyone else said that getting these two departments to cooperate would be impossible. So we had a job to do.

We set up a series of meetings with commissioners and deputy commissioners to discuss our proposal. Our goal was to persuade them that if we could, indeed, raise the money from the City Council and Board of Estimate as an add-on to the Mayor's budget, they would testify that they were willing to implement the program. We had already established that they would not request it, nor would the Mayor fund it. The monies had to come from the City Council as an addition to the Mayor's budget. But if the Commissioners testified to the City Council that the program was unworkable, unwieldy, and undesirable, it would be most difficult to get the funds.

In the first year, despite several thoughtful meetings, we did not get real support from these commissioners. They were subtly and not-so-subtly undermining our proposal right through the budget process. The Commissioner at the time tacked his own favorite proposal on at the last minute, taking advantage of our organizing to get additional monies for the things he most wanted, which we hadn't proposed at all. Our supporters on the City Council finally had to mandate the Commissioner's compliance with our proposal.

But since we had been careful not to make enemies, and held them accountable to the intent of the City Council without attacking them, we were in a position to gradually build a cooperative relationship.

As time went on, the Commissioners embraced the program and in the third year the Mayor took great pride in it, adding two million dollars to the program on his own. The City bureaucrats are definitely our allies now in expanding and enhancing the programs.

5) LOBBYING AND TESTIFYING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

We wrote a letter and sent our proposal to every member of the City Council and Board of Estimate. We took a constituency group to meet with every member of the Board of Estimate, and every member of the Youth Committee and the Finance Committee of the City Council, and we met with the chairpersons of several related committees.

We took as large and representative a group to each meeting as we could muster from their own districts, and made sure to always have young people present as spokespeople. For the first two years the youth spokespeople were almost always from the Youth Action Program, regardless of the geography. Their speaking always had the greatest impact of all.

We scheduled every lobbying meeting from the central office. It did not work to ask people to make appointments with their own legislators. People were too busy. We made all the appointments, and then set up the attendance lists for every meeting. Our members would say, "Just tell me where to go and when to be there," and they would show up ready to speak passionately on behalf of the proposal. We would always have a staff person there to deal with the technicalities and orchestrate the outpouring of support.

We had wonderful lobbying meetings. People old and young; Black, White, Latin, Asian, and Bi-racial; professional and grassroots; religious and secular: we would come together, many never having met each other before, and speak from the heart. We would win over the legislator and leave happy, delighted to be working together.

In addition to the step-by-step lobbying, we made dramatic appearances at the public hearings on the Mayor's budget. There is annually a hearing in every borough, and then a City-wide one. We prepared large numbers of young people to speak, and scheduled many agency directors as well. In 1984 25% of the people who testified at the public hearing were representatives of the Coalition; in 1985 40% of the testimony on the Mayor's budget came from our members. We could not be ignored.

Further, we brought large groups in bright Coalition t-shirts to sit in the audience and to stand and clap after each of our speakers.

During the actual final budget negotiations at City Hall, we carried out a 48 hour vigil. The first year, two of us stayed there all night, continuing to lobby and gradually becoming cheerleaders for our councilpeople who were working through the night to finish up the budget. That year we were the only advocates in City Hall. The second year, thinking that the experience of living through the final hours would be exciting and useful for the young people, we staged a 48-hour vigil with different groups of young people from all over the city coming for tours of duty. To make it a real event with pizazz, we scheduled performances of cheerleaders, drama groups, marchers, song leaders, and bands, to entertain ourselves. But we also ended up entertaining all the legislators all through the night. It became quite a delightful process.

The third and fourth years we maintained the vigil, but we were no longer alone. Every significant advocacy group in New York, learning from our experience, had a representative dwelling in City Hall for the final days, each lobbying for his or her issue, and all of us carrying on quite a convention while the elected officials tried to avoid us.

This combination of systematic lobbying, testifying, and jazzy demonstrations of broad support was most effective. It was, however, dependent on having at least a few well-positioned, strongly supportive legislators. In the third year we had a change in the chairmanship of the finance committee, and the new chair offended the young people by being rude, and in the fourth year he changed the rules, preventing any group from speaking more than four times.

This was directed at us. However, we had already made our mark.

6) INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

Our Coalition was designed to increase the leadership role of young people. The Coalition grew out of the Youth Action Program. The young people there had made youth employment their priority for action in 1982. They had defined youth employment in housing rehabilitation for the homeless as their highest priority for the kind of youth employment they would like to see.

When Mayor Koch instituted a program called the "Capital Jobs Program", for "disadvantaged people" to be employed building housing, we saw an opportunity to tackle youth employment. The Mayor had no provision in his Capital Jobs Program for youth. Our young people's Policy Committee decided we should start a Coalition and try to get young people included in the Capital Jobs Program. They were completely enthusiastic. Their decision to go forward preceded the founding of the Coalition.

They participated in every meeting and event of the Coalition. This was not customary practice in the advocacy community. We had meetings uptown, in our big old funky building, rather than downtown in the main advocacy offices. We had young people speaking up, and we asked their opinion on each issue. This attracted some people and repelled others. There were a very few agency directors who said things like, "I don't have time to waste at meetings in which you give your young people fake leadership development. If they're not able to fend for themselves in a meeting, they're not ready to participate. I don't agree with this approach of making space for young people to speak in adult meetings." But the great majority of our constituency was thrilled at the inclusion of the young people.

The first year, only the Youth Action Program and one other agency had young people prepared to speak at the public hearings. By the fourth year, fourteen agencies had youth representatives prepared to speak out publicly. We consider this one of the significant accomplishments of the Coalition.

This preparation was not simple. The first year twenty young people met every Wednesday night at Youth Action Program to prepare themselves to be well organized, and well spoken at the hearings. They practiced walking in single file, standing up and sitting down in unison, speaking from the heart without notes, speaking from laboriously written notes. We practiced explaining the entire mission of the Coalition, and practiced what we would say at lobbying meetings.

Every year some similar group of young people has had to prepare itself. In the third and fourth years we gave public speaking workshops in several boroughs. Seeing how easy and enjoyable it was, the agencies then took over and prepared their own youth members to speak.

In the third year we held a conference of 300 people, about 230 of them young people, to put together our program for the spring. A speak-out to supportive legislators, and small group discussions, and a wonderful dinner brought out enormous enthusiasm and excitement from the young people. The constituency was there to be organized, waiting for a real role. This is true in every City.

We never had enough staff or money to build on this the way we should have. But it carried the day for our employment proposals!

7) NEGOTIATING WITH AND BUILDING UNITY WITH OTHER ADVOCACY GROUPS

In some ways, this was the trickiest aspect of the campaign. While other advocates helped us enormously by sharing information, tactical thinking, and contacts, they also had competing agendas of their own and at certain points would have resisted our recommendations if we hadn't built such a powerful constituency.

We walked a tightrope here, on the one hand trying to develop a unified proposal that took into account the entire field's agenda, and on the other hand having to defend our own central plank from various onslaughts. Some of the professional advocates tended to be more like the City bureaucrats. They were less identified with local communities, and had less confidence in the model of youth employment in housing rehabilitation for the homeless. They also professed less confidence in the elected officials, often saying that the officials could only understand simple constructs.

At the outset another group of 5 or 6 well respected agencies decried our proposal and our methods. They had a different agenda for youth employment, didn't think young people should be involved in the planning, and didn't think we could get more than one idea across to the legislators. Our Coalition said we would embrace their agenda, and go for a two-pronged approach to youth employment. They said they had no confidence in that, and pulled out. But New York is a big place, and 5 or 6 dissenters had little effect. We continued to advocate for their model, and we got it funded, along with five other models which were gradually added by ourselves and others to the overall program design.

Virtually all the dissenters later benefitted from our success when they applied for and received contracts from the City to implement the program.

We went through various cycles of conflict and resolution, tension and relaxation, cooperation and distrust, with one advocacy group. But through a determined effort to maintain unity, each time, we struggled through to a united position, sometimes achieving the appearance of unity and sometimes reaching real unity. At one point things were so bad that the other group called for "binding arbitration" between us and them regarding the amounts of money we would recommend for each program model. We rejected that, and said we thought we could hammer out an agreement just negotiating with each other. We didn't need outside "experts" to tell us what we could ask for. We were accountable to the constituency that supported our recommendations and we weren't about to abdicate our responsibility to them in favor of some unknown individuals. We did succeed in coming to an agreement through direct negotiations.

Over time we worked out a real modus vivendi, with real mutual respect, because we all had basic commitment to the cause and we all kept our word.

8) MAINTAINING AND MONITORING OUR SUCCESS

Each year we have put some attention on improvements and enhancements needed in the employment program, and have recommended them to the Department of Employment. Generally speaking, they have implemented our recommendations.

We have maintained a supportive and appreciative attitude toward the City agencies involved. They, in turn, have been flexible and supportive to us. Eventually the Mayor embraced it, too, and the City Council and Board of Estimate are still proud of their initiative.

As a result of this organizing, New York City runs the largest municipally-funded youth employment and training program in the country, which includes 6,000 young people each year.

Youth Action Program
1280 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10029
Phone: 212-860-8170

POSTSCRIPT

Everything described in this handbook is probably more difficult than it sounds. Be prepared for long hours, deep disappointments, on-going frustrations, and periodic uncertainty about the impact of it all. You can also anticipate great moments of success as new ideas are generated, exciting projects are completed, deep relationships are formed, and many individual young people gain a new level of confidence, skill, and freedom to act on their own intelligent vision for a better world.

YOUTH ACTION PROGRAM PLEDGE

We, the members of the Youth Action Program, pledge that we are working together:

- to improve and rebuild our community
- to relate to each other in cooperative ways
- to develop our potential as leaders
- to educate and improve ourselves and help others along the way
- to respect our peers, neighbors, and all life
- to be part of a great movement for justice, equality, and peace.

All this we will do with love and with dignity.